"THE BAT IS MY BROTHER" by ROBERT BLOCH

NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢

August Derleth

Manly Wellman

Ray Bradbury

Thorp McClusky

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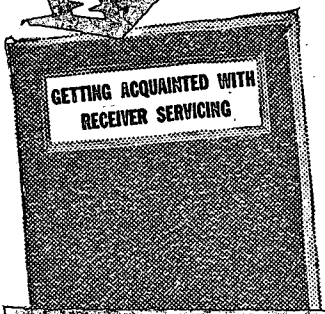

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Weird Tales

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NOVEMBER, 1944 Cover by Matt Fox

LONG NOVELETTE

THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS . . . . . August Derleth 8

Strange, dark and unspeakable elements combine to form the perfection of the hideous

NOVELETTES

RIDE THE EL TO DOOM . . . . . Allison V. Harding 36

When it was decided to raze the elevated nobody ever thought that the El itself might object!

THE BAT IS MY BROTHER . . . . . Robert Bloch 58

A minority problem that shrieks for attention — the neglected vampire!

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From the Continent of centuries ago reaches out a vengeful arm to take back what rightfully belongs to the grave

THE JAR . . . . . Ray Bradbury 49

In it just one of those pale things dreaming and circling with its peeled dead eyes staring out at you . . .

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THE GHOST PUNCH . . . . . Hannes Bok 84

The announcer was introducing the two fighters. Nobody bothered to introduce the ghost . . .

SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS . . . . . Irwin J. Weill 57

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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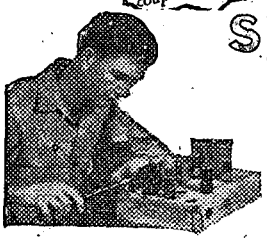

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The Dweller in Darkness

By AUGUST DERLETH

"Searchers after horror haunt strange, far places. For them are the catacombs of Ptolemais, and the carven mausolea of the nightmare countries. They climb to the moonlit towers of ruined Rhine castles, and falter down black cobwebbed steps beneath the scattered stones of forgotten cities in Asia. The haunted wood and the desolate mountain are their shrines, and they linger around the sinister monoliths on uninhabited islands. But the true epicure in the terrible, to whom a new thrill of unutterable ghastliness is the chief end and justification of existence, esteems most of all the ancient, lonely farmhouses of backwoods regions; for there the dark elements of strength, solitude, grotesqueness and ignorance combine to form the perfection of the hideous."—H. P. Lovecraft.

UNTIL recently, if a traveler in north central Wisconsin took the left fork at the junction of the Brule River highway and the Chequamegon pike on the way to Pashepaho, he would find himself in country so primitive that it would seem remote from all human contact. If he drove on along the little used road, he might in time pass a few tumbledown shacks where presumably people had once lived and which have long ago been taken back by the encroaching forest; it is not desolate country, but an area thick with growth, and over all its expanse there persists an intangible aura of the sinister, a kind of ominous oppression of the spirit quickly manifest to even the most casual traveler, for the road he has taken becomes ever more and more difficult to travel, and is eventually lost just short of a deserted lodge built on the edge of a clear blue lake around which century-old trees brood eternally, a country where the only sounds are the cries of the owls, the whippoorwills, and the eerie loons at night, and the wind's voice in the trees, and—but is it always the wind's voice in the trees? And who can say whether the snapped twig is the sign of an animal passing—or of something more, some other creature beyond man's ken?

For the forest surrounding the abandoned lodge at Rick's Lake had a curious reputation long before I myself knew it, a reputation which transcended similar stories about similar primeval places. There were odd rumors about something that dwelt in the depths of the forest's darkness—by no means the conventional wild whisperings of ghosts—of something half-animal, half-man, fearsomely spoken of by such natives as inhabited the edges of that region, and referred to only by stubborn head-shakings among the Indians who occasionally came out of that country and made their way south. The forest had an evil reputation; it was nothing short of that; and already, before the turn of the century, it had a history that gave pause even to the most intrepid adventurer.

The first record of it was left in the writings of a missionary on his way through that country to come to the aid of a tribe of Indians reported to the post at Chequamegon Bay in the north to be starving. Fr. Piregard vanished, but the Indians later brought in his effects: a sandal, his rosary, and a prayer-book in which he had written certain curious words which had been carefully preserved: "I have the conviction that some creature is following me. I thought at

The forest had an evil reputation. There were odd rumors of something unspeakable that dwelt in the depths of its darkness

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Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

first it was a bear, but I am now compelled to believe that it is something incredibly more monstrous than anything of this earth. Darkness is falling, and I believe I have developed a slight delirium, for I persist in hearing strange music and other curious sounds which can surely not derive from any natural source. There is also a disturbing illusion as of great footsteps which actually shake the earth, and I have several times encountered a very large footprint which varies in shape. . . ."

THE second record is far more sinister. When Big Bob Hiller, one of the most rapacious lumber barons of the entire midwest, began to encroach upon the Rick's Lake country in the middle of the last century, he could not fail to be impressed by the stand of pine in the area near the lake; and, though he did not own it, he followed the usual custom of the lumber barons and sent his men in from an adjoining piece he did own, under the intended explanation that he did not know where his line ran. Thirteen men failed to return from that first day's work on the edge of the forest area surrounding Rick's Lake; two of their bodies were never recovered; four were found—inconceivably—in the lake, several miles from where they had been cutting timber; the others were discovered at various places in the forest. Hiller thought he had a lumber war on his hands; laid his men off to mislead his unknown opponent, and then suddenly ordered them back to work in the forbidden region. After he had lost five more men, Hiller pulled out, and no hand since his time touched the forest, save for one or two individuals who took up land there and moved into the area.

One and all, these individuals moved out within a short time, saying little, but hinting much. Yet, the nature of their whispered hints was such that they were soon forced to abandon any explanation; so incredible were the tales they told, with overtones of something too horrible for description, of age-old evil which preceded anything dreamed of by even the most learned archeologist. Only one of them vanished, and no trace of him was ever found. The others came back out of the forest and in the course of time were lost somewhere among other people in the United States—all save a half-breed known as Old Peter, who was obsessed with the idea that there were mineral deposits in the vicinity of the wood, and occasionally went to camp on its edge, being careful not to venture in.

It was inevitable that the Rick's Lake legends would ultimately reach the attention of Professor Upton Gardner of the State University; he had completed collections of Paul Bunyan, Whiskey Jack and Hodag tales, and was engaged upon a compilation of place legends when he first encountered the curious half-forgotten tales that emanated from the region of Rick's Lake. I discovered later that his first reaction to them was one of casual interest; legends abound in out-of-the-way places, and there was nothing to indicate that these were of any more import than others. True, there was no similarity in the strictest sense of the word to the more familiar tales; for, while the usual legends concerned themselves with ghostly appearances of men and animals, lost treasure, tribal beliefs, and the like, those of Rick's Lake were curiously unusual in their insistence upon utterly outré creatures—or "a creature"—since no one had ever *reported* seeing more than one even vaguely in the forest's darkness, half-man, half-beast, with always the hint that this description was inadequate in that it did injustice to the narrator's concept of what it was that lurked there in the vicinity of the lake. Nevertheless, Professor Gardner would in all probability have done little more than add the legends as he heard them to his collection, if it had not been for the reports—seemingly unconnected—of two curious facts, and the accidental discovery of a third.

The two facts were both newspaper accounts carried by Wisconsin papers within a week of each other. The first was

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a terse, half-comic report headed: *Sea Serpent in Wisconsin Lake?* and read: "Pilot Joseph X. Castleton, on test flight over northern Wisconsin yesterday, reported seeing a large animal of some kind bathing by night in a forest lake in the vicinity of Chequamegon. Castleton was caught in a thundershower and was flying low at the time, when, in an effort to ascertain his whereabouts, he looked down when lightning flashed, and saw what appeared to be a very large animal rising from the waters of a lake below him, and vanish into the forest. The pilot added no details to his story, but asserts that the creature he saw was not the Loch Ness monster."

The second story was the utterly fantastic tale of the discovery of the body of Fr. Piregard, well-preserved, in the hollow trunk of a tree along the Brule River. At first called a lost member of the Marquette-Joliet Expedition, Fr. Piregard was quickly identified. To this report was appended a frigid statement by the President of the State Historical Society dismissing the discovery as a hoax.

The discovery Professor Gardner made was simply that an old friend was actually the owner of the abandoned lodge and most of the shore of Rick's Lake.

The sequence of events was thus clearly inevitable. Professor Gardner instantly associated both newspaper accounts with the Rick's Lake legends; this might not have been enough to stir him to drop his researches into the general mass of legends abounding in Wisconsin for specific research of quite another kind, but the occurrence of something even more astonishing sent him posthaste to the owner of the abandoned lodge for permission to take the place over in the interests of science. What spurred him to take this action was nothing less than a request from the curator of the state museum to visit his office late one night and view a new exhibit which had arrived. He went there in the company of Laird Dorgan, and it was Laird who came to me.

But that was after Professor Gardner vanished.

For he did vanish; after sporadic reports from Rick's Lake over a period of three months, all word from the lodge ceased entirely, and nothing further was heard of Professor Upton Gardner.

Laird came to my room at the University Club late one night in October; his frank blue eyes were clouded, his lips tense, his brow furrowed, and there was everything to show that he was in a state of moderate excitation which did not derive from liquor. I assumed that he was working too hard; the first period tests in his University of Wisconsin classes were just over; and Laird habitually took tests seriously—even as a student he had done so, and now as an instructor, he was doubly conscientious.

But it was not that. Professor Gardner had been missing almost a month now, and it was this which preyed on his mind. He said as much in so many words, adding, "Jack, I've got to go up there and see what I can do."

"Man, if the sheriff and the posse haven't discovered anything, what can you do?" I asked.

"For one thing, I know more than they do."

"If so, why didn't you tell them?"

"Because it's not the sort of thing they'd pay any attention to."

"Legends?"

"No."

He was looking at me speculatively, as if wondering whether he could trust me. I was suddenly conscious of the conviction that he *did* know something which he, at least, regarded with the gravest concern; and at the same time I had the curious sensation of premonition and warning that I have ever experienced. In that instant the entire room seemed tense, the air electrified.

"If I go up there—do you think you could go along?"

"I guess I could manage."

"Good." He took a turn or two about

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the room, his eyes brooding, looking at me from time to time, still betraying uncertainty and an inability to make up his mind.

"Look, Laird—sit down and take it easy. That caged lion stuff isn't good for your nerves."

HE TOOK my advice; he sat down, covered his face with his hands, and shuddered. For a moment I was alarmed; but he snapped out of it in a few seconds, leaned back, and lit a cigarette.

"You know those legends about Rick's Lake, Jack?"

I assured him that I knew them and the history of the place from the beginning—as much as had been recorded.

"And those stories in the papers I mentioned to you?"

The stories, too. I remembered them since Laird had discussed with me their effect on his employer.

"That second one, about Fr. Piregard," he began, hesitated, stopped. But then, taking a deep breath, he began again. "You know, Gardner and I went over to the curator's office one night last spring."

"Yes, I was east at the time."

"Of course. Well, we went over there. The curator had something to show us. What do you think it was?"

"No idea. What was it?"

"That body in the tree!"

"No!"

"Gave us quite a jolt. There it was, hollow trunk and all, just the way it had been found. It had been shipped down to the museum for exhibition. But it was never exhibited, of course—for a very good reason. When Gardner saw it, he thought it was a waxwork. But it wasn't."

"You don't mean that it was the real thing?"

Laird nodded. "I know it's incredible."

"It's just not possible."

"Well, yes, I suppose it's impossible. But it was so. That's why it wasn't exhibited—just taken out and buried."

"I don't quite follow that."

He leaned forward and said very earnestly, "Because when it came in it had all the appearance of being completely preserved, as if by some natural embalming process. It wasn't. It was frozen. It began to thaw out that night. And there were certain things about it that indicated that Fr. Piregard hadn't been dead the three centuries history said he had. The body began to go to pieces in a dozen ways—but no crumbling into dust, nothing like that. Gardner estimated that he hadn't been dead over five years. Where had he been in the meantime?"

He was quite sincere. I would not at first have believed it. But there was a certain disquieting earnestness about Laird that forbade any levity on my part. If I had treated his story as a joke, as I had the impulse to do, he would have shut up like a clam, and walked out of my room to brood about this thing in secret, with Lord knows what harm to himself. For a little while I said absolutely nothing.

"You don't believe it."

"I haven't said so."

"I can feel it."

"No. It's hard to take. Let's say I believe in your sincerity."

"That's fair enough," he said grimly. "Do you believe in me sufficiently to go along up to the lodge and find out what may have happened there?"

"Yes, I do."

"But I think you'd better read these excerpts from Gardner's letters first." He put them down on my desk like a challenge. He had copied them off onto a single sheet of paper, and as I took this up he went on, talking rapidly, explaining that the letters had been those written by Gardner from the lodge.

When he finished, I turned to the excerpts and read:

"I cannot deny that there is about the lodge, the lake, even the forest an aura of evil, of impending danger—it is more than that, Laird, if I could explain it, but archeology is my forte, and not fiction. For it would take fiction, I think, to do justice to this thing I feel. . . . Yes, there are times when I have

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the distinct feeling that *someone* or *something* is watching me out of the forest or from the lake—there does not seem to be a distinction as I would like to understand it, and while it does not make me uneasy nevertheless it is enough to give me pause. I managed the other day to make contact with Old Peter, the half-breed. He was at the moment a little the worse for firewater, but when I mentioned the lodge and the forest to him, he drew into himself like a clam. But he did put words to it: he called it the Wendigo—you are familiar with this legend, which properly belongs to the French-Canadian country."

THAT was the first letter, written about a week after Gardner had reached the abandoned lodge on Rick's Lake. The second was extremely terse, and had been sent by special delivery.

"Will you wire Miskatonic University at Arkham, Massachusetts, to ascertain if there is available for study a photostatic copy of a book known as the *Necronomicon*, by an Arabian writer who signs himself Abdul Alhazred? Make inquiry also for the *Pnakotic Manuscripts* and the *Book of Eibon*, and determine whether it is possible to purchase through one of the local bookstores a copy of *The Outsider and Others* by H. P. Lovecraft, published by Arkham House last year. I believe that these books individually and collectively may be helpful in determining just what it is that haunts this place. For there *is* something; make no mistake about that; I am convinced of it, and when I tell you that I believe it has lived here not for years, but for centuries—perhaps even before the time of man—you will understand that I may be on the threshold of great discoveries."

Startling as this letter was, the third and last was even more so. For an interval of a fortnight went by between the second and third letters, and it was apparent that something had happened to threaten Professor Gardner's composure, for his third letter was even in this selected excerpt marked by extreme perturbation.

"Everything evil here. . . . I don't know whether it is the Black Goat With a Thousand Young or the Faceless One and/or something more that rides the wind. For God's sake . . . those accursed fragments! . . . Something in the lake, too, and at night the sounds! How still; and then suddenly those horrible flutes, those watery ululations! Not a bird, not an animal then—only those ghastly sounds. And the voices! . . . Or is it but dream? Is it my own voice I hear in the darkness? . . ."

I found myself increasingly shaken as I read those excerpts. Certain implications and hints lodged between the lines of what Professor Gardner had written were suggestive of terrible, ageless evil, and I felt that there was opening up before Laird Dorgan and myself an adventure so incredible, so bizarre, and so unbelievably dangerous that we might well not return to tell it.

Yet even then there was a lurking doubt in my mind that we would say anything about what we found at Rick's Lake.

"What do you say?" asked Laird impatiently.

"I'm going."

"Good! Everything's ready. I've even got a dictaphone and batteries enough to run it. I've arranged for the sheriff of the county at Pashepaho to replace Gardner's notes, and leave everything just the way it was."

"A dictaphone," I broke in. "What for?"

"Those sounds he wrote about—we can settle that for once and all. If they're there to be heard, the dictaphone will record them; if they're just imagination, it won't." He paused, his eyes very grave. "You know, Jack, we may not come out of this thing?"

"I know."

I did not say so, because I knew that Laird, too, felt the same way I did: that we were going like two dwarfed Davids to face an adversary greater than any Goliath, an adversary invisible and unknown, who bore no name and was shrouded in legend and fear, a dweller not only in the darkness of the wood but in that greater darkness which the mind of man has sought to explore since his dawn.

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II

SHERIFF COWAN was at the lodge when we arrived. Old Peter was with him. The sheriff was a tall, saturnine individual clearly of Yankee stock; though representing the fourth generation of his family in the area, he spoke with a twang which doubtless had persisted from generation to generation. The half-breed was a dark-skinned, ill-kempt fellow; he had a way of saying little, and from time to time grinned or snickered as at some secret joke.

"I brung up express that come some time past for the professor," said the sheriff. "From some-place in Massachusetts was one of 'em, and the other from Sac Prairie, down near Madison. Didn't seem t' me 'twas worth sendin' back. So I took and brung 'em with the keys. Don't know that you fellers'll git anyw'eres. My posse and me went through the hull woods, didn't see a thing."

"You ain't tellin' 'em everything," put in the half-breed, grinning.

"Ain't no more to tell."

"What about that carvin'?"

The sheriff shrugged irritably. "Damn it, Peter, that ain't got nothin' to do with the professor's disappearance."

"He made a drawin' of it, didn't he?"

So pressed, the sheriff confided that two members of his posse had stumbled upon a great slab of rock in the center of the wood; it was mossy and overgrown, but there was upon it an odd drawing, plainly as old as the forest—probably the work of one of the primitive Indian tribes once known to inhabit northern Wisconsin before the Dacotah Sioux and the Winnebago—

Old Peter grunted with contempt. "No Indian drawing."

The sheriff shook this off and went on. The drawing represented some kind of creature, but no one could tell what it was; it was certainly not a man, but on the other hand, it did not seem to be hairy, like a beast. Moreover, the unknown artist had forgotten to put in a face.

"'N beside it there wuz two things," said the half-breed.

"Don't pay no attention to him," said the sheriff then.

"What two things?" demanded Laird.

"Jest things," replied the half-breed, snickering. "Heh, heh! Ain't no other way to tell it—warn't human, warn't animal, jest things."

Cowan was irritated. He became suddenly brusque; he ordered the half-breed to keep still, and went on to say that if we needed him, he would be at his office in Pashepaho. He did not explain how we were to make contact with him, since there was no telephone at the lodge, but plainly he had no high regard for the legends abounding about the area into which we had ventured with such determination. The half-breed regarded us with an almost stolid indifference, broken only by his sly grin from time to time, and his dark eyes examined our luggage with keen speculation and interest. Laird met his gaze from time to time, and each time Old Peter shifted his eyes indolently. The sheriff went on talking; the notes and drawings the missing man had made were on the desk he had used in the big room which made up almost the entire ground floor of the lodge, just where he had found them; they were the property of the State of Wisconsin and were to be returned to the sheriff's office when we had finished with them.

At the threshold he turned for a parting shot to say he hoped we would not be staying too long, because "While I ain't givin' in to any of them crazy ideas—it jest ain't been so healthy for some of the people who came here."

"The half-breed knows or suspects something," said Laird at once. "We'll have to get in touch with him sometime when the sheriff's not around."

"Didn't Gardner write that he was pretty close-mouthed when it came to concrete data?"

"Yes, but he indicated the way out. Firewater."

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WE WENT to work and settled ourselves, storing our food supplies, setting up the dictaphone, getting things into readiness for a stay of at least a fortnight; our supplies were sufficient for this length of time, and if we had to remain longer, we could always go into Pashepaho for more food. Moreover, Laird had brought fully two dozen dictaphone cylinders, so that we had plenty of them for an indefinite time, particularly since we did not intend to use them except when we slept—and this would not be often, for we had agreed that one of us would watch while the other took his rest, an arrangement we were not sanguine enough to believe would hold good without fail, hence the machine. It was not until after we had settled our belongings that we turned to the things the sheriff had brought, and meanwhile, we had ample opportunity to become aware of the very definite aura of the place.

For it was not imagination that there was a strange aura about the lodge and the grounds. It was not alone the brooding, almost sinister stillness, not alone the tall pines encroaching upon the lodge, not alone the blue-black waters of the lake, but something more than that: a hushed, almost menacing air of waiting, a kind of aloof assurance that was ominous—as one might imagine a hawk might feel leisurely cruising above prey it knows will not escape its talons. Nor was this a fleeting impression, for it was obvious almost at once, and it grew with sure steadiness throughout the hour or so that we worked there; moreover, it was so plainly to be felt, that Laird commented upon it as if he had long ago accepted it, and knew that I too had done so! Yet there was nothing primary to which this could be attributed. There are thousands of lakes like Rick's in northern Wisconsin and Minnesota, and while many of them are not in forest areas, those which are do not differ greatly in their physical aspects from Rick's; so there was nothing in the appearance of the place which at all contributed to the brooding sense of horror which seemed to invade us from outside. Indeed, the setting was rather the opposite; under the afternoon sunlight, the old lodge, the lake, the high forest all around had a pleasant air of seclusion—an air which made the contrast with the intangible aura of evil all the more pointed and fearsome. The fragrance of the pines, together with the freshness of the water served, too, to emphasize the intangible mood of menace.

We turned at last to the material left on Professor Gardner's desk. The express packages contained, as expected, a copy of *The Outsider and Others,* by H. P. Lovecraft, shipped by the publishers, and photostatic copies of manuscript and printed pages taken from the *R'lyeh Text* and Ludwig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis*—apparently sent for to supplement the earlier data dispatched to the professor by the librarian of Miskatonic University, for we found among the material brought back by the sheriff certain pages from the *Necronomicon,* in the translation by Olaus Wormius, and likewise from the *Pnakotic Manuscripts.* But it was not these pages, which for the most part were unintelligible to us, which held our attention. It was the fragmentary notes left by Professor Gardner.

IT WAS quite evident that he had not had time to do more than put down such questions and thoughts as had occurred to him, and, while there was little assimilation manifest, yet there was about what he had written a certain terrible suggestiveness which grew to colossal proportions as everything he had not put down became obvious.

"Is the slab (a) only an ancient ruin, (b) a marker similar to a tomb, (c) or a focal point for Him? If the latter, from outside? Or from beneath? (NB: Nothing to show that the thing has been disturbed.)

"Cthulhu or Kthulhut. In Rick's Lake? Subterrene passage to Superior and the sea via the St. Lawrence? (NB: Except for the aviator's story, nothing to show that the Thing has anything to do with the water.

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Probably not one of the water beings.

"Hastur. But manifestations do not seem to have been of air beings either.

"Yog-Sothoth. Of earth certainly—but he is not the 'Dweller in Darkness.' (NB: The Thing, whatever it is, must be of the earth deities, even though it travels in time and space. It could possibly be more than one, of which only the earth being is occasionally visible. Ithaqua, perhaps?)

"'Dweller in Darkness.' Could He be the same as the Blind, Faceless One? He could be truly said to be dwelling in darkness. Nyarlathotep? Or Shub-Niggurath?

"What of fire? There must be a deity here, too. But no mention. (NB: Presumably, if the Earth and Water Beings oppose those of Air, then they must oppose those of Fire as well. Yet there is evidence here and there to show that there is more constant struggle between Air and Water Beings than between those of Earth and Air. Abdul Alhazred is damnably obscure in places. There is no clue as to the identity of Cthugha in that terrible footnote.

"Partier says I am on the wrong track. I'm not convinced. Whoever it is that plays the music in the night is a master of hellish cadence and rhythm. And, yes, of cacophony. (Cf: Bierce and Chambers.")

That was all.

"What incredible gibberish!" I exclaimed.

And yet—and yet I knew instinctively it was not gibberish. Strange things had happened here; things which demanded an explanation which was not terrestrial; and here, in Gardner's handwriting, was evidence to show that he had not only arrived at the same conclusion, but passed it. However it might sound, Gardner had written it in all seriousness, and clearly for his own use alone, since only the vaguest and most suggestive outline seemed apparent. Moreover, the notes had had a startling effect on Laird; he had gone quite pale, and now stood looking down as if he could not believe what he had seen.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Jack—he was in contact with Partier."

"It doesn't register," I answered, but even as I spoke I remembered the hush-hush that had attended the severing of old Professor Partier's connection with the University of Wisconsin. It had been given out to the press that the old man had been somewhat too liberal in his lectures in anthropology—that is, that he had "Communistic leanings!"—which everyone who knew Partier realized was far from the facts. But he had said strange things in his lectures, he had talked of horrible, forbidden matters, and it had been thought best to let him out quietly. Unfortunately, Partier went out trumpeting in his contemptuous manner, and it had been difficult to hush the matter up satisfactorily.

"He's living down in Wausau now," said Laird.

"Do you suppose he could translate all this?" I asked and knew that I had echoed the thought in Laird's mind.

"He's almost a day away by car. We'll copy these notes, and if nothing happens—if we can't discover anything, we'll go to see him."

If nothing happened—!

IF THE lodge by day had seemed brooding in an air of ominousness, by night it seemed surcharged with menace. Moreover, events began to take place with disarming and insidious suddenness, beginning in mid-evening, when Laird and I were sitting over those curious photostats sent out by Miskatonic University in lieu of the books and manuscripts themselves, which were far too valuable to permit out of their haven. The first manifestation was so simple that for some time neither of us noticed its strangeness. It was simply the sound in the trees as of rising wind, the growing song among the pines. The night was warm, and all the windows of the lodge stood open. Laird commented on the wind, and went on giving voice to his perplexity regarding the fragments before us. Not until half an hour had gone by and the sound of the wind had risen to the proportions of a gale did it occur to Laird

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that something was wrong, and he looked up, his eyes going from one open window to another in growing apprehension. Then I, too, became aware.

Despite the tumult of the wind, no draft of air had circulated in the room, not one of the light curtains at the window was so much as trembling!

With one simultaneous movement, both of us stepped out upon the broad veranda of the lodge.

There was no wind, no breath of air stirring to touch our hands and faces. There was only the sound in the forest. And both of us looked up to where the pines were silhouetted against the star-swept heavens, expecting their tops would be bending before a high gale; but there was no movement whatever; the pines stood still, motionless; and the sound as of wind continued from all around us. We stood on the veranda for half an hour, vainly attempting to determine the source of the sound—and then, as unobtrusively as it had begun, it stopped!

The hour was now approaching midnight, and Laird prepared for bed; he had slept little the previous night, and we had agreed that I was to take the first watch until four in the morning. Neither of us said much about the sound in the pines, but what was said indicated a desire to believe that there was a natural explanation for the phenomenon, if we could establish a point of contact for understanding. It was inevitable, I suppose, that even in the face of all the curious facts which had come to our attention, there should still be an earnest wish to find a natural explanation. Certainly the oldest fear and the greatest fear to which man is prey is fear of the unknown; anything capable of rationalization and explanation cannot be feared; but it was growing hourly more patent that we were facing something which defied all known rationales and credos, but hinged upon a system of belief that antedated even primitive man, and indeed, as scattered hints within the photostat pages from Miskatonic University suggested, antedated even earth itself. And there was always that brooding terror, the ominous suggestion of menace from something far beyond the grasp of such a puny intelligence as man's.

THUS it was with some trepidation that I prepared for my vigil. After Laird had gone to his room, which was at the head of the stairs, with a door opening upon a railed-in balcony looking down into the lodge room where I sat with the book by Lovecraft, reading here and there in its pages, I settled down to a kind of apprehensive waiting. It was not that I was afraid of what might take place, but rather that I was afraid that what took place might be beyond my understanding. However, as the minutes ticked past, I became engrossed in *The Outsider and Others,* with its hellish suggestions of aeon-old evil, of entities co-existent with all time and conterminous with all spaces, and I began to understand, however vaguely, a relation between the writings of this fantasiste and the curious notes Professor Gardner had made. The most disturbing factor in this cognizance was the knowledge that Professor Gardner had made his notes independent of the book I now read, since it had arrived after his disappearance. Moreover, though there were certain keys to what Gardner had written in the first material he had received from Miskatonic University, there was growing now a mass of evidence to indicate that the professor had had access to some other source of information.

What was that source? Could he have learned something from Old Peter? Hardly likely. Could he have gone to Partier? It was not impossible that he had done so, though he had not imparted this information to Laird. Yet it was not to be ruled out that he had made contact with still another source of which there was no hint among his notes.

It was while I was engaged in this engrossing speculation that I became conscious of the music. It may actually have been sounding for some time before I

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heard it, but I do not think so. It was a curious melody that was being played, beginning as something lulling and harmonious, and then subtly becoming cacophonous and demoniac, rising in tempo, though all the time coming as from a great distance. I listened to it with growing astonishment; I was not at first aware of that sense of evil which fell upon me the moment I stepped outside and became cognizant that the music emanated from the depths of the dark forest. There, too, I was sharply conscious of its weirdness; the melody was unearthly, utterly bizarre and foreign, and the instruments which were being used seemed to be flutes, or certainly some variation of flutes.

Up to that moment there was no really *alarming* manifestation. That is, there was nothing but the suggestiveness of the two events which had taken place to inspire fear. There was, in short, always a good possibility that there might be a natural explanation about the sound as of wind and that of music.

But now, suddenly, there occurred something so utterly horrible, something so fraught with terror, that I was at once made prey to the most terrible fear known to man, a surging primitive horror of the unknown, of something from outside—for if I had had doubts about the things suggested by Gardner's notes and the material accompanying them, I knew instinctively that they were unfounded, for the sound that succeeded the strains of that unearthly music was of such a nature that it defied description, and defies it even now. It was simply a ghastly ululation, made by no beast known to man, and certainly by no man. It rose to an awful crescendo and fell away into a silence that was the more terrible for this soul-searing crying. It began with a two-note call, twice repeated, a frightful sound: *"Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih!"* and then became a triumphant wailing cry that ululated out of the forest and into the dark night like the hideous voice of the pit itself: *"Eh-ya-ya-ya-yahaaahaaahaaahaaa-ah-ah-ah-ngh 'aaaa-ngh' aaa-ya-ya yaa . . ."*

I stood for a minute absolutely frozen to the veranda. I could not have uttered a sound if it had been necessary to save my life. The voice had ceased, but the trees still seemed to echo its frightful syllables. I heard Laird tumble from his bed, I heard him running down the stairs calling my name, but I couldn't answer. He came out on the veranda and caught hold of my arm.

"Good God! What was that?"

"Did you hear it?"

"I heard enough."

We stood waiting for it to sound again, but there was no repetition of it. Nor was there a repetition of the music. We returned to the sitting room and waited there, neither of us able to sleep.

But there was not another manifestation of any kind throughout the remainder of that night!

III

THE occurrences of that first night more than anything else decided our direction on the following day. For, realizing that we were too ill-informed to cope with any understanding with what was taking place, Laird set the dictaphone for that second night, and we started out for Wausau and Professor Partier, planning to return on the following day. With forethought, Laird carried with him our copy of the notes Gardner had left, skeletal as they were.

Professor Partier, at first reluctant to see us, admitted us finally to his study in the heart of the Wisconsin city, and cleared books and papers from two chairs, so that we could sit down. Though he had the appearance of an old man, wore a long white beard, and a fringe of white hair straggled from under his black skull cap, he was as agile as a young man; he was thin, his fingers were bony, his face gaunt, with deep, black eyes, and his features were set in an expression that was one of profound cynicism, disdainful, almost contemptuous,

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and he made no effort to make us comfortable, beyond providing places for us to sit.

He recognized Laird as Professor Gardner's secretary, said brusquely that he was a busy man preparing what would doubtless be his last book for his publishers, and he would be obliged to us if we would state the object of our visit as concisely as possible.

"What do you know of Cthulhu?" asked Laird bluntly.

The professor's reaction was astonishing. From an old man whose entire attitude had been one of superiority and aloof disdain, he became instantly wary and alert; with exaggerated care he put down the pencil he had been holding, his eyes never once left Laird's face, and he leaned forward a little over his desk.

"So," he said, "you come to me." He laughed then, a laugh which was like the cackling of some centenarian. "You come to me to ask about Cthulhu. Why?"

Laird explained curtly that we were bent upon discovering what had happened to Professor Gardner. He told as much as he thought necessary, while the old man closed his eyes, picked up his pencil once more and, tapping gently with it, listened with marked care, prompting Laird from time to time. When he had finished, Professor Partier opened his eyes slowly and looked from one to the other of us with an expression that was not unlike one of pity mixed with pain.

"So he mentioned me, did he? But I had no contact with him other than one telephone call." He pursed his lips. "He had more reference to an earlier controversy than to his discoveries at Rick's Lake. I would like now to give you a little advice."

"That's what we came for."

"Go away from that place, and forget all about it."

Laird shook his head in determination.

Partier estimated him, his dark eyes challenging his decision; but Laird did not falter. He had embarked upon this venture, and he meant to see it through.

"These are not forces with which common men have been accustomed to deal," said the old man then. "We are frankly not equipped to do so." He began then, without other preamble, to talk of matters so far removed from the mundane as to be almost beyond conception. Indeed, it was some time before I began to comprehend what he was hinting at, for his concept was so broad and breath-taking that it was difficult for anyone accustomed to so prosaic an existence as mine to grasp. Perhaps it was because Partier began obliquely by suggesting that it was not Cthulhu or his minions who haunted Rick's Lake, but clearly another; the existence of the slab and what was carved upon it clearly indicated the nature of the being who dwelled there from time to time. Professor Gardner had in final analysis got on to the right path, despite thinking that Partier did not believe it. Who was the Blind, Faceless One but Nyarlathotep? Certainly not Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of a Thousand Young.

HERE Laird interrupted him to press for something more understandable, and then at last, realizing that we knew nothing, the professor went on, still in that vaguely oblique manner, to expound mythology—a mythology of pre-human life not only on the earth, but on the stars of all the universe. "We know nothing," he repeated from time to time. "We know nothing at all. But there are certain signs, certain shunned places. Rick's Lake is one of them." He spoke of beings whose very names were awesome—of the Elder Gods who live on Betelguese, remote in time and space, who had cast out into space the Great Old Ones, led by Azathoth and Yog-Sothoth, and numbering among them the primal spawn of the amphibious Cthulhu, the bat-like followers of Hastur the Unspeakable, of Lloigor, Zhar, and Ithaqua, who walked

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the winds and interstellar space, the earth beings, Nyarlathotep and Shub-Niggurath —the evil beings who sought always to triumph once more over the Elder Gods, who had shut them out or imprisoned them—as Cthulhu long ago slept in the ocean realm of R'lyeh, as Hastur was imprisoned upon a black star near Aldebaran in the Hyades. Long before human beings walked the earth, the conflict between the Elder Gods and the Great Old Ones had taken place; and from time to time the Old Ones had made a resurgence toward power, sometimes to be stopped by direct interference by the Elder Gods, but more often by the agency of human or non-human beings serving to bring about a conflict among the beings of the elements, for, as Gardner's notes indicated, the evil Old Ones were elemental forces. And every time there had been a resurgence, the mark of it had been left deep upon man's memory—though every attempt was made to eliminate the evidence and quiet survivors.

"What happened at Innsmouth, Massachusetts, for instance?" he asked tensely. "What took place at Dunwich? In the wilds of Vermont? At the old Tuttle house on the Aylesbury Pike? What of the mysterious cult of Cthulhu, and the utterly strange voyage of exploration to the Mountains of Madness? What beings dwelt on the hidden and shunned Plateau of Leng? And what of Kadath in the Cold Waste? Lovecraft knew! Gardner and many another have sought to discover those secrets, to link the incredible happenings which have taken place here and there on the face of the planet—but it is not desired by the Old Ones that mere men shall know too much. Be warned!"

He took up Gardner's notes without giving either of us a chance to say anything, and studied them, putting on a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles which made him look more ancient than ever, and going on talking, more to himself than to us, saying that it was held that the Old Ones had achieved a higher degree of development in some aspects of science than was hitherto believed possible, but of that, of course, nothing was *known*. The way in which he consistently emphasized this indicated very clearly that only a fool or an idiot would disbelieve, proof or no proof. But in the next sentence, he admitted that there was certain proof—the revolting and bestial plaque bearing a representation of a hellish monstrosity walking on the winds above the earth found in the hand of Josiah Alwyn when his body was discovered on a small Pacific island seven months after his incredible disappearance from his home in Wisconsin; the drawings made by Professor Gardner—and, even more than anything else, that curious slab of carven stone in the forest at Rick's Lake.

"Cthugha," he murmured then, wonderingly. "I've not read the footnote to which he makes reference. And there's nothing in Lovecraft." He shook his head. "No, I don't know." He looked up. "Can you frighten something out of the half-breed?"

"We've thought of that," admitted Laird.

"Well, now, I advise a try. It seems evident that he knows something—it may be nothing but an exaggeration to which his more or less primitive mind has lent itself; but on the other hand—who can say?"

MORE than this Professor Partier could not or would not tell us. Moreover, Laird was reluctant to ask, for there was obviously a damnably disturbing connection between what he had revealed, however incredible it might be, and what Professor Gardner had written.

Our visit, however, despite its inconclusiveness—or perhaps because of it—had a curious effect on us. The very indefiniteness of the professor's summary and comments, coupled with such fragmentary and disjointed evidence which had come to us independently of Partier, sobered us and increased Laird's determination to get to the bottom of the mystery

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surrounding Gardner's disappearance, a mystery which had now become enlarged to encompass the greater mystery of Rick's Lake and the forest around it.

On the following day we returned to Pashepaho, and, as luck would have it, we passed Old Peter on the road leading from town. Laird slowed down, backed up, and leaned out to meet the old fellow's speculative gaze.

"Lift?"

"Reckon so."

Old Peter got in and sat on the edge of the seat until Laird unceremoniously produced a flask and offered it to him; then his eyes lit up; he took it eagerly and drank deeply, while Laird made small talk about life in the north woods and encouraged the half-breed to talk about the mineral deposits he thought he could find in the vicinity of Rick's Lake. In this way some distance was covered, and during this time, the half-breed retained the flask, handing it back at last when it was almost empty. He was not intoxicated in the strictest sense of the word, but he was uninhibited, and he made no protest when we took the lake road without stopping to let him out, though when he saw the lodge and knew where he was, he said thickly that he was off his route, and had to be getting back before dark.

He would have started back immediately, but Laird persuaded him to come in with the promise that he would mix him a drink.

He did. He mixed him as stiff a drink as he could, and Peter downed it.

Not until he had begun to feel its effects did Laird turn to the subject of what Peter knew about the mystery of the Rick's Lake country, and instantly then the half-breed became close-mouthed, mumbling that he would say nothing, he had seen nothing, it was all a mistake, his eyes shifting from one to the other of us. But Laird persisted. He had seen the slab of carven stone, hadn't he? Yes—reluctantly. Would he take us to it? Peter shook his head violently. Not now. It was nearly dark, it might be dark before they could return.

But Laird was adamant, and finally the half-breed, convinced by Laird's insistence that they could return to the lodge and even to Pashepaho, if Peter liked, before darkness fell, consented to lead us to the slab. Then, despite his unsteadiness, he set off swiftly into the woods along a lane that could hardly be called a trail, so faint it was, and loped along steadily for almost a mile before he drew up short and, standing behind a tree, as if he were afraid of being seen, pointed shakily to a little open spot surrounded by high trees at enough of a distance that ample sky was visible overhead.

"There—that's it."

The slab was only partly visible, for moss had grown over much of it. Laird, however, was at the moment only secondarily interested in it; it was manifest that the half-breed stood in mortal terror of the spot and wished only to escape.

"How would you like to spend the night there, Peter?" asked Laird.

The half-breed shot a frightened glance at him. "Me? Gawd, no!"

Suddenly Laird's voice steeled. "Unless you tell us what it was you saw here, that's what you're going to do."

The half-breed was not so much the worse for liquor that he could not foresee events—the possibility that Laird and I might overcome him and tie him to a tree at the edge of this open space. Plainly, he considered a bolt for it, but he knew that in his condition, he could not outrun us.

"Don't make me tell," he said. "It ain't supposed to be told. I ain't never told no one—not even the professor."

"We want to know, Peter," said Laird with no less menace.

THE half-breed began to shake; he turned and looked at the slab as if he thought at any moment an inimical being might rise from it and advance upon him with lethal intent. "I can't, I can't,"

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he muttered, and then, forcing his bloodshot eyes to meet Laird's once more, he said in a low voice, "I don't know what it was. Gawd! it was awful. It was a Thing—didn't have no face, hollered there till I thought my eardrums'd bust, and them things that was with it—Gawd!" He shuddered and backed away from the tree, toward us. "Honest t' Gawd, I seen it there one night. It jist come, seems like, out of the air and there it was a-singin' and a-wailin' and them things playin' that damn' music. I guess I was crazy for a while afore I got away." His voice broke, his vivid memory recreated what he had seen; he turned, shouting harshly, "Let's git outa here!" and ran back the way we had come, weaving among the trees.

Laird and I ran after him, catching up easily, Laird reassuring him that we would take him out of the woods in the car, and he would be well away from the forest's edge before darkness overtook him. He was as convinced as I that there was nothing imagined about the half-breed's account, that he had indeed told us all he knew; and he was silent all the way back from the highway to which we took Old Peter, pressing five dollars upon him so that he could forget what he had seen in liquor if he were so inclined.

"What do you think?" asked Laird when we reached the lodge once more.

I shook my head.

"That wailing night before last," said Laird. "The sounds Professor Gardner heard—and now this. It ties up—damnably, horribly." He turned on me with intense and fixed urgence. "Jack, are you game to visit that slab tonight?"

"Certainly."

"We'll do it."

It was not until we were inside the lodge that we thought of the dictaphone, and then Laird prepared at once to play whatever had been recorded back to us. Here at least, he reflected, was nothing dependent in any way upon anyone's imagination; here was the product of the machine, pure and simple, and everyone of intelligence knew full well that machines were far more dependable than men, having neither nerves nor imagination, knowing neither fear nor hope. I think that at most we counted upon hearing a repetition of the sounds of the previous night; not in our wildest dreams did we look forward to what we did actually hear, for the record mounted from the prosaic to the incredible, from the incredible to the horrible, and at last to a cataclysmic revelation that left us completely cut away from every credo of normal existence.

IT BEGAN with the occasional singing of loons and owls, followed by a period of silence. Then there was once more that familiar rushing sound, as of wind in the trees, and this was followed by the curious cacophonous piping of flutes. Then there was recorded a series of sounds, which I put down here exactly as we heard them in that unforgettable evening hour:

Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih! EEE-ya-ya-ya-yahaah-aaahaaa-ah-ha-ah-ngh 'aaa-ngh' aaa-ya-ya-yaaa! (In a voice that was neither human nor bestial, but yet of both.)

(An increased tempo in the music, becoming more wild and demoniac.)

Mighty Messenger—Nyarlathotep . . . from the world of Seven Suns to his earth place, the Wood of N'gai, whither may come Him Who Is Not to be Named. . . . There shall be abundance of those from the Black Goat of the Woods, the Goat with the Thousand Young. . . . (In a voice that was curiously human.)

(A succession of odd sounds, as if audience-response: a buzzing and humming, as of telegraph wires.)

Iä! Iä! Shub-Niggurath! Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih! EEE-yaa-yaa-haa-haaa-haaaa! (In the original voice neither human nor beast, yet both.)

Ithaqua shall serve thee, Father of the million favored ones, and Zhar shall

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be summoned from Arcturus, by the command of "Umr At-Tawil, Guardian of the Gate." . . . Ye shall unite in praise of Azathoth, of Great Cthulhu, of Tsathoggua. . . . (The human voice again.)

Go forth in his form or in whatever form chosen in the guise of man, and destroy that which may lead them to us. . . . (The half-bestial, half-human voice once more.)

(An interlude of furious piping, accompanied once again by a sound as of the flapping of great wings.)

Ygnaiih! Y'bthnk . . . h'ehye-n'grkdl' lh . . . Iä! Iä! Iä! (Like a chorus.)

THESE sounds had been spaced in such a way that it seemed as if the beings giving rise to them were moving about within or around the lodge, and the last choral chanting faded away, as if the creatures were departing. Indeed, there followed such an interval of silence that Laird had actually moved to shut off the machine when once again a voice came from it.

But the voice that now emanated from the dictaphone was one which, simply because of its nature, brought to a climax all the horror so cumulative in what had gone before it; for whatever had been inferred by the half-bestial bellowings and chants, the horribly suggestive conversation in accented English, that which now came from the dictaphone was unutterably terrible.

"Dorgan! Laird Dorgan! Can you hear me?"

A hoarse, urgent whisper calling out to my companion, who sat white-faced now, staring at the machine above which his hand was still poised. Our eyes met. It was not the appeal, it was not everything that had gone before, it was the identity of that voice—*for it was the voice of Professor Upton Gardner!* But we had no time to ponder this, for the dictaphone went mechanically on.

"Listen to me! Leave this place. Forget. But before you go, summon Cthugha. For centuries this has been the place where evil beings from outermost cosmos have touched upon Earth. I know. I am theirs. They have taken me, as they took Piregard and many others—all who came unwarily within their wood and whom they did not at once destroy. It is His wood—the Wood of N'gai, the terrestrial abode of the Blind, Faceless One, the Howler in the Night, the Dweller in Darkness, Nyarlathotep, who fears only Cthugha. I have been with him in the star spaces. I have been on the shunned Plateau of Leng—to Kadath in the Cold Waste, beyond the Gates of the Silver Key, even to Kythamil near Arcturus and Mnar, to N'kai and the Lake of Hali, to K'n-yan and fabled Carcosa, to Yaddith and Y'ha-nthlei near Innsmouth, to Yoth and Yuggoth, and from far off I have looked upon Zothique, from the eye of Algol. When Fomalhaut has topped the trees, call forth to Cthugha in these words, thrice repeated: *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthugha Fomalhaut n'ghaghaa naf'l thagn. Iä! Cthugha!* When He has come, go swiftly, lest you too be destroyed. For it is fitting that this accursed spot be blasted so that Nyarlathotep comes no more out of interstellar space. Do you hear me, Dorgan? Do you hear me? Dorgan! Laird Dorgan!"

There was a sudden sound of sharp protest, followed by a scuffling and tearing noise, as if Gardner had been forcibly removed, and then silence, utter and complete!

For a few moments Laird let the record run, but there was nothing more, and finally he started it over, saying tensely, "I think we'd better copy that as best we can. You take every other speech, and let's both copy that formula from Gardner."

"Was it . . .?"

"I'd know his voice anywhere," he said shortly.

"He's alive then?"

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He looked at me, his eyes narrowed. "We don't know that."

"But his voice!"

He shook his head, for the sounds were coming forth once more, and both of us had to bend to the task of copying, which was easier than it promised to be for the spaces between speeches were great enough to enable us to copy without undue haste. The language of the chants and the words to Cthugha enunciated by Gardner's voice offered extreme difficulty, but by means of repeated playings, we managed to put down the approximate equivalent of the sounds. When finally we had finished, Laird shut the dictaphone off and looked at me with quizzical and troubled eyes, grave with concern and uncertainty. I said nothing; what we had just heard, added to everything that had gone before, left us no alternative. There was room for doubt about legends, beliefs, and the like—but the infallible record of the dictaphone was conclusive even if it did no more than verify half-heard credos—for it was true, there was still nothing definite; it was as if the whole was so completely beyond the comprehension of man that only in the oblique suggestion of its individual parts could something like understanding be achieved, as if the entirety were too unspeakably soul-searing for the mind of man to withstand.

"Fomalhaut rises almost at sunset—a little before, I think," mused Laird—clearly, like myself, he had accepted what we had heard without challenge other than the mystery surrounding its meaning. "It should be above the trees—presumably twenty to thirty degrees above the horizon, because it doesn't pass near enough to the zenith in this latitude to appear above these pines—at approximately an hour after darkness falls. Say nine-thirty or so."

"You aren't thinking of trying it tonight?" I asked. "After all—what does it mean? Who or what is Cthugha?"

"I don't know any more than you. And I'm not trying it tonight. You've forgotten the slab. Are you still game to go out there—after this?"

I nodded. I did not trust myself to speak, but I was not consumed by any eagerness whatever to dare the darkness that lingered like a living entity within the forest surrounding Rick's Lake.

Laird looked at his watch, and then at me, his eyes burning with a kind of feverish determination, as if he were forcing himself to take this final step to face the unknown being whose manifestations had made the wood its own. If he expected me to hesitate, he was disappointed; however beset by fear I might be, I would not show it. I got up and went out of the lodge at his side.

IV

THERE are aspects of hidden life, exterior as well as of the depths of the mind, that are better kept secret and away from the awareness of common man; for there lurk in dark places of the earth terrible desiderata, horrible revenants belonging to a stratum of the subconscious which is mercifully beyond the apprehension of common man—indeed, there are aspects of creation so grotesquely shuddersome that the very sight of them would blast the sanity of the beholder. Fortunately, it is not possible even to bring back in anything but suggestion what we saw on the slab in the forest at Rick's Lake that night in October, for the thing was so unbelievable, transcending all known laws of science, that adequate words for its description have no existence in the language.

We arrived at the belt of trees around the slab while afterglow yet lingered in the western heavens, and by the illumination of a flashlight Laird carried, we examined the face of the slab itself, and the carving on it: of a vast, amorphous creature, drawn by an artist who evidently lacked sufficient imagination to etch the creature's face, for it had none, bearing only a curious, cone-like head which even in stone seemed

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to have a fluidity which was unnerving; moreover, the creature was depicted as having both tentacle-like appendages and hands—or growths similar to hands, not only two, but several; so that it seemed both human and non-human in its structure. Beside it had been carved two squat squid-like figures from a part of which—presumably the heads, though no outline was definitive—projected what must certainly have been instruments of some kind, for the strange, repugnant attendants appeared to be playing them.

Our examination was necessarily hurried, for we did not want to risk being seen here by whatever might come, and it may be that in the circumstances, imagination got the better of us. But I do not think so. It is difficult to maintain that consistently sitting here at my desk, removed in space and time from what happened there; but I maintain it. Despite the quickened awareness and irrational fear of the unknown which obsessed both of us, we kept a determined open-mindedness about every aspect of the problem we had chosen to solve. If anything, I have erred in this account on the side of science over that of imagination. In the plain light of reason, the carvings on that stone slab were not only obscene, but bestial and frightening beyond measure, particularly in the light of what Partier had hinted, and what Gardner's notes and the material from Miskatonic University had vaguely outlined, and even if time had permitted, it is doubtful if we could have looked long upon them.

We retreated to a spot comparatively near the way we must take to return to the lodge, and yet not too far from the open place where the slab lay, so that we might see clearly and still remain hidden in a place easy of access to the return path. There we took our stand and waited in that chilling hush of an October evening, while stygian darkness encompassed us, and only one or two stars twinkled high overhead, miraculously visible among the towering tree-tops.

ACCORDING to Laird's watch, we waited exactly an hour and ten minutes before the sound as of wind began, and at once there was a manifestation which had about it all the trappings of the supernatural; for no sooner had the rushing sound begun, then the slab we had so quickly quitted began to glow—at first so indistinguishably that it seemed an illusion, and then with a phosphorescence of increasing brilliance, until it gave off such a glow that it was as if a pillar of light extended upward into the heavens. This was the second curious circumstance—the light followed the outlines of the slab, and flowed upward; it was not diffused and dispersed around the glade and into the woods, but shone heavenward with the insistence of a directed beam. Simultaneously, the very air seemed charged with evil; all around us lay thickly such an aura of fearsomeness that it rapidly became impossible to remain free of it. It was apparent that by some means unknown to us the rushing sound as of wind which now filled the air was not only associated with the broad beam of light flowing upward, *but was caused by it;* morever, as we watched, the intensity and color of the light varied constantly, changing from a blinding white to a lambent green, from green to a kind of lavender; occasionally it was so intensely brilliant that it was necessary to avert our eyes, but for the most part it could be looked at without hurt to our eyes.

As suddenly as it had begun, the rushing sound stopped, the light became diffuse and dim; and almost immediately the weird piping as of flutes smote upon our ears. It came not from around us, but from *above,* and with one accord, both of us turned to look as far into heaven as the now fading light would permit.

Just what took place then before our eyes I cannot explain. Was it actually something that came hurtling down, streaming down, rather?—for the masses were shapeless—or was it the product of an imagination that proved singularly uniform when later Laird and I found opportunity to com-

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pare notes? The illusion of great black things streaking down in the path of that light was so great that we glanced back at the slab.

What we saw there sent us screaming voicelessly from that hellish spot.

For, where but a moment before there had been nothing, there was now a gigantic protoplasmic mass, a colossal being who towered upward toward the stars, and whose actual physical being was in constant flux; and flanking it on either side were two lesser beings, equally amorphous, holding pipes or flutes in appendages and making that demoniac music which echoed and re-echoed in the enclosing forest. But the thing on the slab, the Dweller in Darkness, was the ultimate in horror; for from its mass of amorphous flesh there grew at will before our eyes tentacles, claws, hands, and withdrew again; the mass itself diminished and swelled effortlessly, and where its head was and its features should have been there was only a blank facelessness all the more horrible because even as we looked there rose from its blind mass a low ululation in that half-bestial, half-human voice so familiar to us from the record made in the night!

We fled, I say, so shaken that it was only by a supreme effort of will that we were able to take flight in the right direction. And behind us the voice rose, the blasphemous voice of Nyarlathotep, the Blind, Faceless One, the Mighty Messenger, even while there rang in the channels of memory the frightened words of the half-breed, Old Peter—*It was a Thing—didn't have no face, hollered there till I thought my ear-drums 'd bust, and them things that was with it—Gawd!*—echoed there while the voice of that Being from outermost space shrieked and gibbered to the hellish music of the hideous attending flute-players, rising to ululate through the forest and leave its mark forever in memory!

Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih! EEE-yayayayayaaa-haaahaaahaaahaaa - ngh 'aaa-ngh' aaa-ya-ya-yaaa!

Then all was still.

And yet, incredible as it may seem, the ultimate horror awaited us.

FOR we had gone but halfway to the lodge when we were simultaneously aware of something following; behind us rose a hideous, horribly suggestive *sloshing* sound, as if the amorphous entity had left the slab which in some remote time must have been erected by its worshippers, and were pursuing us. Obsessed by abysmal fright, we ran as neither of us has ever run before, and we were almost upon the lodge before we were aware that the sloshing sound, the trembling and shuddering of the earth—as if some gigantic being walked upon it—had ceased, and in their stead came only the calm, unhurried tread of footsteps.

But the footsteps were not our own! And in the aura of unreality, the fearsome outsideness in which we walked and breathed, the terrible suggestiveness of those footsteps was almost maddening!

We reached the lodge, lit a lamp and sank into chairs to await whatever it was that was coming so steadily, unhurriedly on, mounting the veranda steps, putting its hand on the knob of the door, swinging the door open.

It was Professor Gardner who stood there!

For one cataclysmic moment, we sat open-mouthed and gazed at him as at a man returned from the dead.

Then Laird sprang up, crying, "Professor Gardner!"

The professor smiled reservedly and put one hand up to shade his eyes. "If you don't mind, I'd like the light dimmed. I've been in the dark for so long."

Laird turned to do his bidding without question, and he came forward into the room, walking with the ease and poise of a man who is as sure of himself as if he had never vanished from the face of the earth more than three months before, as if he had not made a frantic appeal to us during the night just past, as if . . .

I glanced at Laird; his hand was still at

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the lamp, but his fingers were no longer turning down the wick, simply holding to it, while he gazed down unseeing. I looked over at Professor Gardner; he sat with his head turned from the light, his eyes closed, a little smile playing about his lips; at that moment he looked precisely as I had often seen him look at the University Club in Madison, and it was as if everything that had taken place here at the lodge were but an evil dream.

But it was not a dream!

"You were gone last night?" asked the professor.

"Yes. But, of course, we had the dictaphone."

"Ah! You heard something then?"

"Would you like to hear the record, sir?"

"Yes, I would."

Laird went over and put it on the machine to play it again, and we sat in silence, listening to everything upon it, no one saying anything until it had been completed. Then the professor slowly turned his head.

"What do you make of it?"

"I don't know what to make of it, sir," answered Laird. "The speeches are too disjointed—except for yours. There seems to be some coherence there."

SUDDENLY, without warning, the room was surcharged with menace; it was but a momentary impression, but Laird felt it as keenly as I did, for he started noticeably. He was taking the record from the machine when the professor spoke again.

"It doesn't occur to you that you may be the victim of a hoax?"

"No."

"And if I told you that I had found it possible to make every sound that was registered on that record?"

Laird looked at him for a full minute before replying in a low voice that of course, Professor Gardner had been investigating the phenomena of Rick's Lake woods for a far longer time than we had, and if he said so . . .

A harsh laugh escaped the professor. "Entirely natural phenomena, my boy! There's a mineral deposit under that grotesque slab in the woods; it gives off light and also a miasma that is productive of hallucinations. It's as simple as that. As for the various disappearances—sheer folly, human failings, nothing more, but with the air of coincidence. I came here with high hopes of verifying some of the nonsense to which old Partier lent himself long ago—but—" He smiled disdainfully, shook his head, and extended his hand. "Let me have the record, Laird."

Without question, Laird gave Professor Gardner the record. The older man took it and was bringing it up before his eyes when he jogged his elbow and, with a sharp cry of pain, dropped it. It broke into dozens of pieces on the floor of the lodge.

"Oh!" cried the professor. "I'm sorry." He turned his eyes on Laird. "But then—since I can duplicate it any time for you from what I've learned about the lore of this place, by way of Partier's mouthings—" He shrugged.

"It doesn't matter," said Laird quietly.

"Do you mean to say that everything on that record was just your imagination, Professor?" I broke in. "Even that chant for the summoning of Cthugha?"

The older man's eyes turned on me; his smile was sardonic. "Cthugha? What do you suppose he or that is but the figment of someone's imagination? And the inference—my dear boy, use your head. You have before you the clear inference that Cthugha has his abode on Fomalhaut which is twenty-seven light years away, and that, if this chant is thrice repeated when Fomalhaut has risen, Cthugha will appear to somehow render this place no longer habitable by man or outside entity. How do you suppose that could be accomplished?"

"Why, by something akin to thought-transference," replied Laird doggedly. "It's not unreasonable to suppose that if we were to direct thoughts toward Fomalhaut that something there might receive them—

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granting that there might be light there. Thought is instant. And that they in turn may be so highly developed that dematerialization and rematerialization might be as swift as thought."

"My boy—are you serious?" The older man's voice revealed his contempt.

"You asked."

"Well, then, as the hypothetic answer to a theoretical problem, I can overlook that."

"Frankly," I said again, disregarding a curious negative shaking of Laird's head, "I don't think that what we saw in the forest tonight was just hallucination—caused by a miasma rising out of the earth, or otherwise."

The effect of this statement was extraordinary. Visibly, the professor made every effort to control himself; his reactions were precisely those of a savant challenged by a cretin in one of his classes. After a few moments he controlled himself and said only, "You've been there then. I suppose it's too late to make you believe otherwise."

"I've always been open to conviction, sir, and I lean to the scientific method," said Laird.

Professor Gardner put his hand over his eyes and said, "I'm tired. I noticed last night when I was here that you're in my old room, Laird—so I'll take the room next to you, opposite Jack's."

He went up the stairs as if nothing had happened between the last time he had occupied the lodge and this.

V

THE rest of the story—and the culmination of that apocalyptic night—are soon told.

I could not have been asleep for more than an hour—the time was one of the morning—when I was awakened by Laird. He stood beside my bed fully dressed and in a tense voice ordered me to get up and dress, to pack whatever essentials I had brought, and be ready for anything. Nor would he permit me to put on a light to do so, though he carried a small pocket-flash, and used it sparingly. To all my questions, he cautioned me to wait.

When I had finished, he led the way out of the room with a whispered, "Come."

He went directly to the room into which Professor Gardner had disappeared. By the light of his flash, it was evident that the bed had not been touched; moreover, in the faint film of dust that lay on the floor, it was clear that Professor Gardner had walked into the room, over to a chair beside the window, and out again.

"Never touched the bed, you see," whispered Laird.

"But why?"

Laird gripped my arm, hard. "Do you remember what Partier hinted—what we saw in the woods—the protoplasmic, amorphousness of the thing? And what the record said?"

"But Gardner told us—" I protested.

Without a further word, he turned. I followed him downstairs, where he paused at the table where we had worked and flashed the light upon it. I was surprised into making a startled exclamation which Laird hushed instantly. For the table was bare of everything but the copy of *The Outsider and Others* and three copies of *Weird Tales*, a magazine containing stories supplementing those in the book by the eccentric Providence genius, Lovecraft. All Gardner's notes, all our own notations, the photostats from Miskatonic University—everything was gone!

"He took them," said Laird. "No one else could have done so."

"Where did he go?"

"Back to the place from which he came." He turned on me, his eyes gleaming in the reflected glow of the flashlight. "Do you understand what that means, Jack?"

I shook my head.

"*They* know we've been there, *they* know we've seen and learned too much."

"But how?"

"You told them."

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"I? Good God, man, are you mad? How could I have told them?"

"Here, in this lodge, tonight—you yourself gave the show away, and I hate to think of what might happen now. We've got to get away."

For one moment all the events of the past few days seemed to fuse into an unintelligible mass; Laird's urgence was unmistakable, and yet the thing that he suggested was so utterly unbelievable that its contemplation even for so fleeting a moment threw my thoughts into the extremest confusion.

Laird was talking now, quickly. "Don't you think it odd—how he came back? How he came out of the woods *after* that hellish thing we saw there—not before? And the questions he asked—the drift of those questions. And how he managed to break the record—our one scientific proof of something? And now, the disappearance of all the notes—of everything that might point to substantiation of what he called 'Partier's nonsense'?"

"But if we are to believe what he told us?"

He broke in before I could finish. "One of them was right. Either the voice on the record calling to me—or the man who was here tonight."

"The man!"

But whatever I wanted to say was stilled by Laird's harsh, *"Listen!"*

FROM outside, from the depths of that horror-haunted darkness, the earth-haven of the dweller in dark came once more, for the second time that night, the weirdly beautiful, yet cacophonous strains of flute-like music, rising and falling, accompanied by a kind of chanted ululation, and by the sound as of great wings flapping.

"Yes, I hear," I whispered.

"Listen closely!"

Even as he spoke, I understood. There was something more—the sounds from the forest were not only rising and falling—*they were approaching!*

"Now do you believe me?" demanded Laird. *"They're coming for us!"* He turned on me. "The chant!"

"What chant?" I fumbled stupidly.

"The Cthugha chant—do you remember it?"

"I took it down. I've got it here."

For an instant I was afraid that this, too, might have been taken from us; but it was not; it was in my pocket where I had left it.

With shaking hands, Laird tore the paper from my grasp.

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthugha Fomalhaut n'gha-ghaa naf'l thagn. Iä! Cthugha!" he said, running to the veranda, myself at his heels.

Out of the woods came the bestial voice of the dweller in the dark. *"Ee-ya-ya-haa-haahaaa! Ygnaiih! Ygnaiih!"*

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthugha Fomalhaut n'gha-ghaa naf'l thagn! Iä! Cthugha!" repeated Laird for the second time.

Still the ghastly melée of sounds from the woods came on, in no way diminished, rising now to supreme heights of terror-fraught fury, with the bestial voice of the thing from the slab added to the wild, mad music of the pipes, and the sound as of wings.

And then, once more, Laird repeated the primal words of the chant.

On the instant that the final guttural sound had left his lips, there began a sequence of events no human eye was ever destined to witness. For suddenly the darkness was gone, giving way to a fearsome amber glow; simultaneously the flute-like music ceased, and in its place rose cries of rage and terror. Then, instantaneously, there appeared thousands of tiny points of light—not only on and among the trees, but on the earth itself, on the lodge and the car standing before it. For still a further moment we were rooted to the spot, and then it was borne in upon us that the myriad points of light were *living entities of flame!* For wherever they touched, fire sprang up, seeing which, Laird rushed into the lodge for such of our things as he could

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carry forth before the holocaust made it impossible for us to escape Rick's Lake.

He came running out—our bags had been downstairs—gasping that it was too late to take the dictaphone or anything else, and together we dashed toward the car, shielding our eyes a little from the blinding light all around. But even though we had shielded our eyes, it was impossible not to see the great amorphous shapes streaming skyward from this accursed place, nor the equally great being hovering like a cloud of living fire above the trees. So much we saw, before the frightful struggle to escape the burning woods forced us to forget mercifully the other details of that terrible, maddened flight.

HORRIBLE as were the things that took place in the darkness of the forest at Rick's Lake, there was something more cataclysmic still, something so blasphemously conclusive that even now I shudder and tremble uncontrollably to think of it. For in that brief dash to the car, I saw something that explained Laird's doubt, I saw what had made him take heed of the voice on the record and not of the thing that came to us as Professor Gardner. The keys were there before, but I did not understand; even Laird had not fully believed. Yet it was given to us—we did not know. "It is not desired by the Old Ones that mere man shall know too much," Partier had said. And that terrible voice on the record had hinted even more clearly: *Go forth in his form or in whatever form chosen in the guise of man, and destroy that which may lead them to us. . . .* Destroy that which may lead them to us! Our record, the notes, the photostats from Miskatonic University, yes, and even Laird and myself! And the thing had gone forth, for it was Nyarlathotep, the Mighty Messenger, the Dweller in Darkness who had gone forth and who had returned into the forest to send his minions back to us. It was he who had come from interstellar space even as Cthugha, the fire-being, had come from Fomalhaut upon the utterance of the command that woke him from his eon-long sleep upon that amber star, the command that Gardner, the living-dead captive of the terrible Nyarlathotep had discovered in those fantastic travelings in space and time; and it was he who returned whence he had come, with his earth-haven now forever rendered useless for him with its destruction by the minions of Cthugha!

I know, and Laird knows. We never speak of it.

If we had had any doubt, despite everything that had gone before, we could not forget that final, soul-searing discovery, the thing we saw when we shielded our eyes from the flames all around and looked away from those beings in the heavens, the line of footprints that led away from the lodge in the direction of that hellish slab deep in the black forest, *the footprints that began in the soft soil beyond the veranda in the shape of a man's footprints, and changed with each step into a hideously suggestive imprint made by a creature of incredible shape and weight, with variations of outline and size so grotesque as to have been incomprehensible to anyone who had not seen the thing on the slab—and beside them, torn and rent as if by an expanding force, the clothing that once belonged to Professor Gardner, left piece by piece along the trail back into the woods, the trail taken by the hellish monstrosity that had come out of the night, the Dweller in Darkness who had visited us in the shape and guise of Professor Gardner!*

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A Gentleman from Prague

By STEPHEN GRENDON

MR. SIMON DEKRUGH inserted the key into the lock, turned it, and entered his house. Ah, but it was good to get in out of the rain! And it was good to be home again after that long and fatiguing trip across the Continent. The channel had been so rough, too. Having turned up the light and shed his outer clothing, Dekrugh put one of his bags up against the wall of the hall and carried the other with him into his study. He lost no time in going to the telephone.

Though the hour was late, he was put through readily enough.

"Abel? This is Simon."

"Ah, you're back? When?"

"Just now. I've something to show you. I was in Prague."

"You don't mean—not Septimus Halos'!"

"Can you run over for a bit? I daresay I shall be able to intrigue you, Abel."

"I'll be over, unless I'm caught in the fog."

"Walk in. The door is unlocked."

Grave robbing has its own reward, even if payment is sometimes made by one centuries old!

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

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He walked to the bathroom and looked at himself in the glass. A little tired. Perhaps a little nervous. He had had those unaccountable impressions just before getting on the boat, and once again on the boat train from Dover. Curious! Even now he looked involuntarily over his shoulder. He had shaved that morning, and did not need to shave again.

He came out of the bathroom and turned up the radio. The B. B. C. newscaster was on the air and he stood for a moment or two listening. "Failure of the Munich Pact was forecast today by no less a personage than Mr. David Lloyd-George. The former minister represented the Pact as but a temporary stay and expressed the hope that Britain's rearmament would have proceeded to such a point by the time war actually broke out, that . . ." He turned the dial to another station and got a re-broadcast of a symphony concert. Humming a Brahms theme, he returned to the hall, picked up the bag there, and was on his way to his room when his houseman appeared at the head of the stairs in a flood of light, having been disturbed by his coming.

"Welcome home, Mr. Dekrugh. Let me take your things, sir."

Dekrugh surrendered his bag, apologizing for having disturbed him. "How has everything been, Maxon?"

"Very good, sir. Mr. Abel Speers telephoned several times."

"I expect him."

"Shall I dress, sir?"

"No, no—go back to bed."

"Thank you, sir. I hope you had a good holiday."

"Very satisfactory, Maxon. *Very* satisfactory."

It had been, too. He returned to his study and began to open the little bag on the table; but no, not yet; let it wait until Speers got here. He sat down and drew over today's *Times,* turning, as was his invariable custom, to the letters columns, which informed him perhaps as accurately as any other source just what down-countrymen were concerning themselves about.

IT WAS only half an hour before Mr. Abel Speers came. He had driven over himself, not trusting the Underground or the omnibuses. A fog of a sort coming up, he said. Still raining somewhat, though. Beastly night.

He was a fat, jovial man, pink with well-being.

"Have you really got it, Simon?"

Dekrugh patted the little bag on the table, and smiled.

"How in the devil did you manage?"

"Oh, it was quite simple, really," answered Dekrugh deprecatingly. "I thought the blasted Germans would be having Prague and everything in it soon enough anyway; so there was no good reason why I should not have a go at doing a little—well, what do you call it?—despoiling?"

"Grave-robbing, to put it bluntly."

Dekrugh made a grimace of distaste. "Bluntness has its place, Abel, but spare me. Let us say I decided to get a share of the spoils Chamberlain ought to have assured for us if he had made up his mind to sign his name to that Munich deal."

"So then you got at Halos' grave?"

"Don't be so infernally impatient, Abel."

He turned to the bag and opened it, talking as he did so. "Anyway, it wasn't a grave—just a kind of stone coffin in that old church. Apart from the heavy lid, it did not offer too great a problem. The thing was right there in the dust and bones. I simply reached in and took it out. It's genuine twelfth century, I think, with a Latin inscription and a rather heavy gold chain."

He took out a rather heavy shaving kit, dumped out his razor, pried up the stiff lining, and revealed a surprisingly sizable opening, at the moment filled with a gold chain. Dekrugh took out the gold chain and laid it, together with the little square of jeweled gold to which it was attached, on the table under the light.

"Gad, Simon!"

"Interesting, eh?"

"The Latin inscription seems to be clear enough. What does it say?"

Dekrugh turned the molded plaque around. "Read it for yourself. I'm a little rusty on my Humanities."

"'*What is mine, belongs to me.*' Hm!"

"Quaint, isn't it?"

The fat man's face paled a little. "I don't know that I like it, exactly."

Dekrugh laughed. "My dear fellow, I got away scot free. Not a soul suspected

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anything. I was quite alone in the church; the padre had gone out to get a light so that I could read the seal better. . . . "

"What seal?"

Dekrugh shrugged. "I'm afraid I didn't pay much attention to the fellow when he came back and read it. I'd got what I came after, and the only reason I didn't clear out at once was to keep him from getting suspicious about my visit. The usual curse and so on—quite a few of those old religious seemed to put a lot of stock in curses. Well, I got out, nobody suspected anything wrong, luck was just with me, that's all. I got the thing hid, and not one of the customs officers guessed. And here it is."

Speers turned it over deliberately, examining it. "What the devil would Franz Verda want with it?"

"A curious piece, Abel. With a strange history."

"But the price he offered us. . . . "

"Very satisfactory, eh?"

"The piece isn't worth it."

"It is to Verda." He shrugged. "The man had some motive in getting hold of it, Abel. He read about it in a book. Very well. I got hold of the book. It's the usual sort of thing—all about the piece having some psychic power for its possessor, with the appropriate mumbo-jumbo said over it. Don't expect me to argue with one of our clients. We're here to deliver the goods, not quibble about what we're being paid unless the figure isn't high enough.

SPEERS shrugged. "That's not the trouble this time."

"Will you take it with you?"

"I'll call for it in the morning and take it down to him. Unless you'd rather. He's in Sussex just now."

"Then I'll put it away."

"Who was this fellow, anyway?"

"Septimus Halos? Oh, a priest, or something. Seventh son of a seventh son and said to have magic powers. People believed in a great deal of superstition in those days, of course. It's a wonder we've freed ourselves from most of it, even now. Verda is just one of those curious people who more than half believe a great deal of the stuff they read; only, he has money."

Speers looked around for a decanter, and Dekrugh took the hint. He went off to get something to drink, and Speers looked at the jeweled plaque again. A heavy thing to wear around one's neck. Made up like some of the pieces worn by the clergy, though; so much seemed evident. He had the sudden impulse to look over his shoulder; it was unaccountable but he could not keep from doing it. Dekrugh was just coming in with a whiskey and soda.

Dekrugh laughed. "Now *you've* caught it, Abel. You've got a bad conscience—I've been catching myself doing that ever since I left Prague."

Speers laughed pointedly at the thought of Dekrugh's having a conscience.

"Good Scotch, Simon."

"The best. I can afford it—even if I have to rob graves."

"Funny thing to print on that piece, though. *What is mine, belongs to me.*"

"Rather obvious, isn't it?"

"I don't know. Maybe it's double-talk."

"That far back in time they had a hard enough time just talking—let alone in double-talk. There's fog in your bones, Abel."

They made a little more small talk, and Abel Speers left.

Dekrugh put the treasure from Prague into a drawer of his library table, and went upstairs to bed.

AT ABOUT this hour, a gentleman got off the Underground in the vicinity of St. John's Wood. He was clad in a long ulster of inconceivably ancient design, and wore a curious cocked hat. A scarf was wound around most of his face, and his eyes were concealed behind square dark spectacles. He stood on the curb looking about him for a cab, unmindful of the rain falling around him.

"Rum go," said a fellow traveler in the compartment he had quitted. "Smelled like something been a long time in a closet, he did."

"Soap is what he needs," said another. "Soap and water. And good plenty of it."

The rain came down desultorily, dripping from his hat, running down the cane he carried. He stood quite still, nevertheless, and when at last a cab came driving along, he raised his cane, and, when it stopped opposite him, got in.

"Where to, sir?"

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After an annoying interval, he gave an address. The driver had to ask him to repeat it; the old fellow apparently had trouble articulating; he spoke with a suspiciously foreign accent. When he heard it at last, the driver shook his head.

"Oh, he ain't home, Guv'nor. Cousin of my wife's works there. He's on the Continent. Holiday."

"Drive there," said his fare.

"If you say so, Guv'nor, there you'll go. But it won't do you no good—unless he's come home tonight. I ain't seen Maxon for two, three days. Mucky night, sir."

No answer.

"Rain changing to fog, says the B. B. C. Channel fog rolling, too."

No answer.

Damned surly fare, thought the driver. He drove slowly, carefully; no use taking any risks. The distance was not great in any case. He thought of going round about by a circuitous way, but there was that about his passenger which decided him against trying any monkey business.

He got the smell of him presently and opened the side window a little, rain notwithstanding. The rain smelled like London; his fare smelled like something far away. Country man, he thought. Old fellow up in the city for perhaps the first time in his life.

"Ever been in London before?"

No answer.

The driver grew indignant. "I say, sir—ever been in London before?"

"Yes."

"Long ago?"

"Not long."

"Queen Victoria's time," muttered the driver.

"Not long," repeated his fare in his queer, cracked voice. "Four centuries ago."

Centuries, thought the driver to himself. Centuries!—why, that's hundreds of years! The bloke's balmly. Been drinking, probably.

He drove up before the house in St. John's wood.

"Here we are, sir."

His passenger paid him; the light was dim, but it felt like good coin of the realm. He was not niggardly, by the feel of it. He touched his hat, though at the moment, as his fare passed him, he wished to hold his nose. He smelled like something from the ground. Yes, that was it. Not clean. Like I always say, he said to himself as he got back into his cab, a man can't bet on what he can find on the streets of London these rainy nights.

THE gentleman in the ulster, meanwhile, stood on the sidewalk contemplating the dark mass of the house which was the object of his visit.

As he started his cab again, the driver leaned out and called to him. "He ain't home, just like I told yer." Then he drove away.

The gentleman in the ulster was momentarily alone. But not for long.

A bobby on his round came upon him within a few moments.

"Lost, sir?" he asked.

The black spectacles looked at him.

"I say—are you off your bearings, sir?"

"The house of Mr. Simon Dekrugh," said the gentleman in the ulster.

"Right here. You've got it. Mr. Dekrugh expecting you?"

No answer.

Uncivil chap, thought the bobby. "The walk's right there." He flashed his light, and in the reflected glow saw something odd—something white where nothing white should be—between the dark spectacles and the scarf. He was oddly startled, but dismissed it as the fellow turned his back as an illusion; rain and fog played queer tricks with the eyes.

The gentleman in the ulster went up the walk, climbed the steps, and rang the bell.

Upstairs, Maxon, who had not yet got back to sleep, stirred and awakened. He lay listening. The bell rang again. He got up wearily, put on his dressing-robe and slippers, and went downstairs.

He opened the door.

"Mr. Dekrugh?"

"I'm sorry. He's sleeping. He just got home from a long trip."

"I wish to see him."

"I'm sorry. I can't wake him."

"Wake him."

Something about the gentleman on the stoop chilled Maxon. He backed into the hall; the visitor walked in.

"Wake him," he said again, planting his cane firmly on the floor.

"Whom shall I say is calling?" asked

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Maxon, suddenly overcome with an overpowering fright of he knew not what, a fright which, because he did not know its origin, was all the more terrifying.

"Say to him a gentleman from Prague wishes to see him."

Maxon closed the door and hurried up the stairs. He knocked on the door of Dekrugh's room. The gentleman in the hall below heard a colloquy above, and presently the door of the room was opened. There were further words.

Then Dekrugh came down the stairs, his face a-scowl with anger.

"What the devil's up?" he demanded.

"I am," said the visitor.

"In this weather too, and at such an hour," growled Dekrugh.

"You should have thought of that."

"I didn't catch your name?"

"I didn't give it."

They stood facing each other, until the gentleman in the ulster shifted his cane to his left hand and extended his right.

"I have come for my property."

Dekrugh looked at the extended hand with the black glove fitting so loosely upon it; then his eyes caught sight of something that showed between the rim of the glove and the edge of the ulster, and at the same time he was aware of an overpowering charnel scent. What he saw between the glove and the ulster was bone. Nothing else.

He gasped and looked up.

The gentleman in the ulster had shaken down his scarf a little, so that Dekrugh got the full benefit of his face—what there was of it.

Dekrugh fainted.

AFTER the silence below became intolerable, Maxon descended rather hesitantly, thinking that perhaps Dekrugh had returned to bed. But no, the light was still up, and it was not like Dekrugh to forget.

Dekrugh lay in the study. He was dead. The drawer of the library table had been torn out.

Poor Maxon! What a time he had of it! The Inspector from Scotland Yard put him through such an interrogation that he was left badly shaken. But there was that inexplicable feature of Dekrugh's death no one could explain—how a piece of bone, the terminable bone of an index finger, could have become stuck into Dekrugh's flesh at his neck, embedded in one of the marks of strangulation. For Dekrugh had been strangled, and, while the marks left on his neck suggested a pair of hands, they must have been most peculiar hands indeed—not at all soft, but hard—hard as bone!

Scotland Yard picked up the trail of the gentleman in the ulster a block away from the house; but lost it at the Underground and did not find it again. Later on, there was a report from Dover, and eventually someone working in connection with another matter in Ostend made a routine reference to a traveler resembling the gentleman in the ulster whom Scotland Yard sought, on the Berlin train.

If a German agent, beyond apprehension, sorry.

Late that very night, well before any word of Dekrugh's death was broadcast, Maxon's cousin's husband, the taxi-driver, quite unaware of Maxon's plight, emptied his pockets and totted up his day's take. He found in his possession a very queer coin, of a type which he had never seen before, and his father-in-law, who was a numismatist, pounced upon it with great eagerness.

"I don't know where I got it," said the younger man. "Unless maybe it was from that stinking old bloke I took around to St. John's Wood. Worth anything?"

"Worth! Coo! A small fortune! Rare as rune stones. It's a twelfth century coin from Bohemia!"

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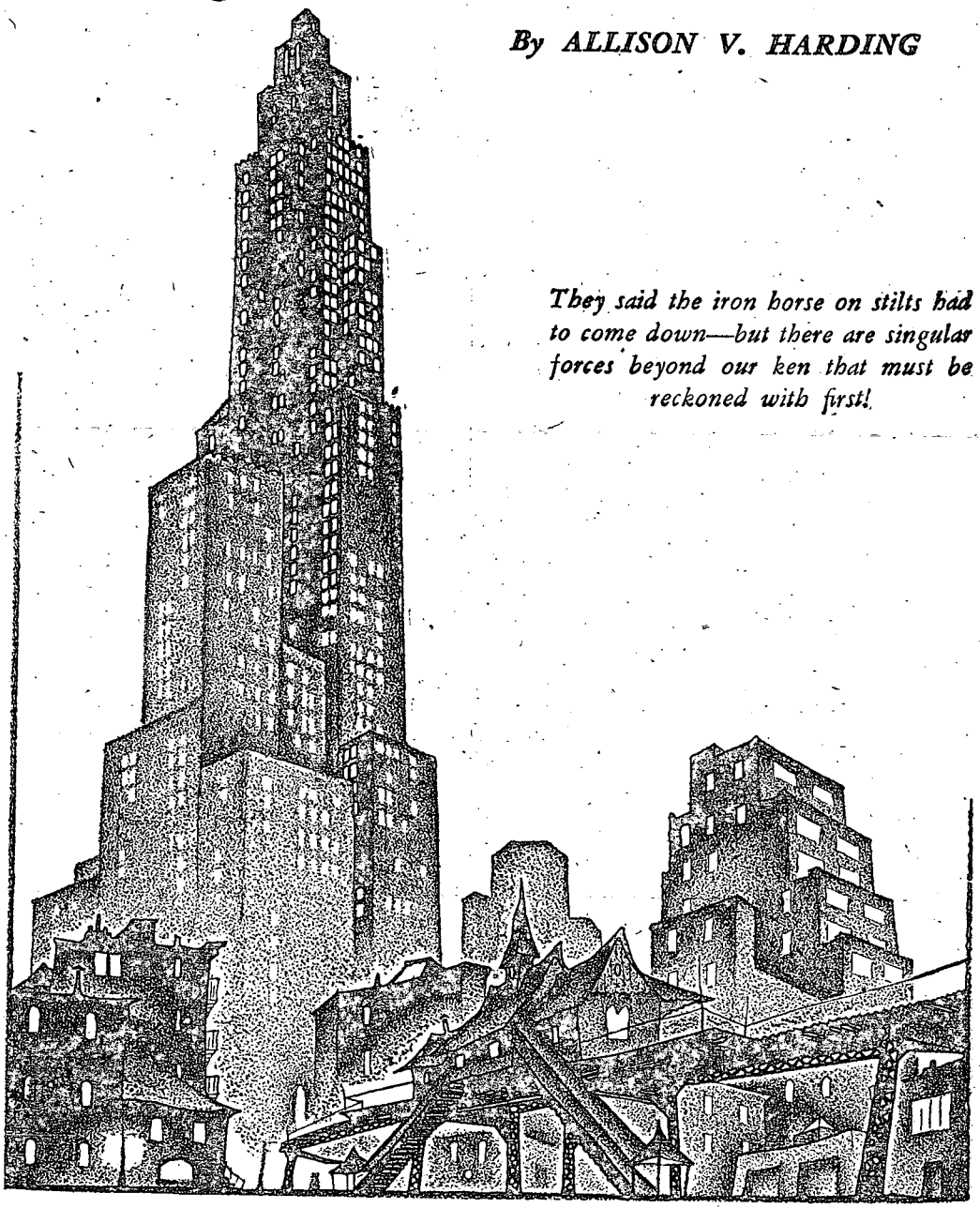
Ride the El to Doom

By ALLISON V. HARDING

They said the iron horse on stilts had to come down—but there are singular forces beyond our ken that must be reckoned with first!



JACK LARUE sat in the first half-empty coach of the elevated. His left hand was hooked over an old black lunchbox, his right elbow leaned on the rust-streaked window sill. The el clattered and vibrated along and Larue peered out at the dingy squalor that passed the window in three- and four-story uniformity. The slanting rays of the afternoon sun caught the train in brilliance, but there was

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nothing left to sparkle or shine and the brightness only served to show up the worn seats and the lustreless metal and iron.

The train bent its stiff-jointed rigidity around a curve. The wheels groaned and squealed, and the clattering became a wooden-like rumbling as the cars headed up an incline onto the West River Bridge. Larue lifted his eyes from the swirling muddy water that ran beneath to the city beyond. He never failed to get a kick out of coming home from the foundry in the evening and seeing the city before him. His part in construction was small and humble, yet he never failed to marvel at the shining towers and edifices, evidence of the deeper purpose and achievement of a trade he felt a small part of.

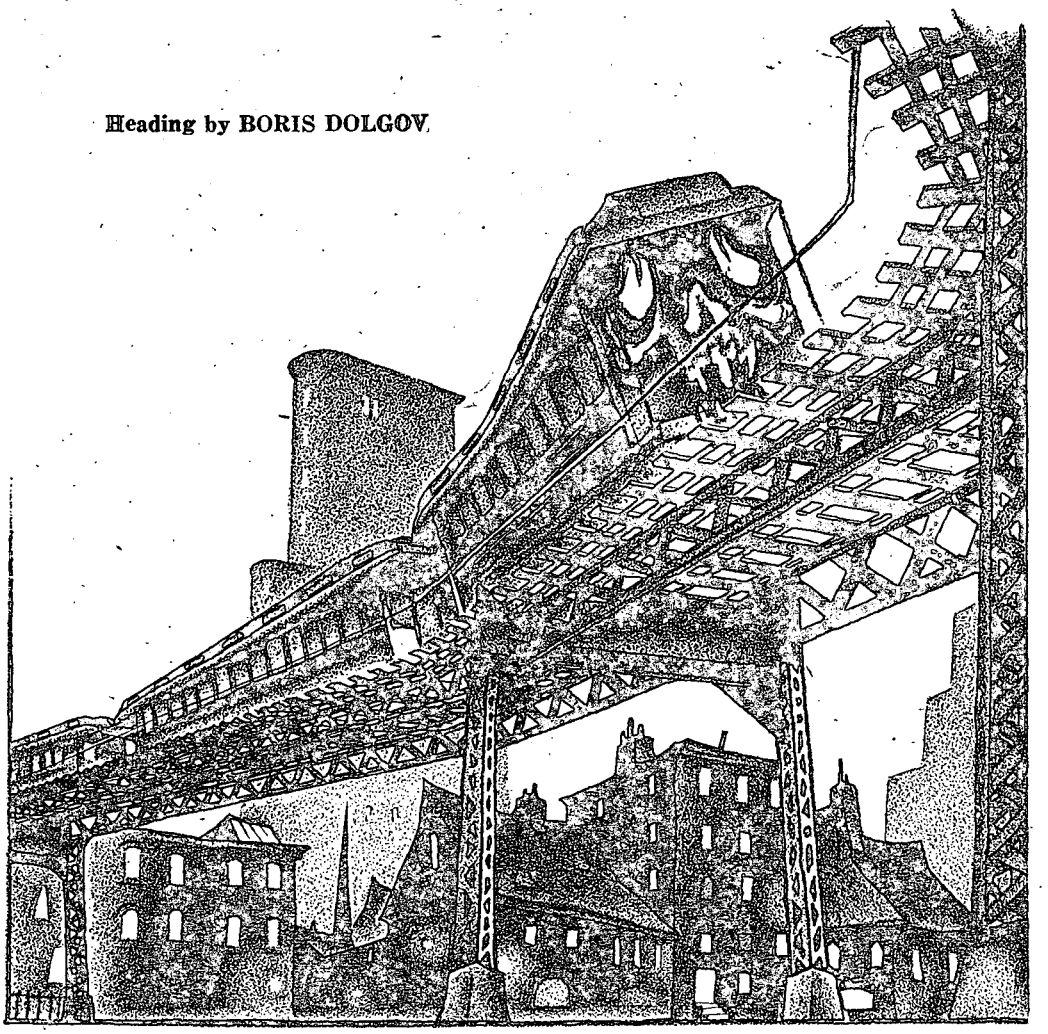
Larue got to his feet and started heavily up the aisle toward the front. To the right of the aisle in his little compartment was the motorman. From long familiarity, Jack jerked the door open.

"C'mon, Pete," he yelled above the clatter of the train, "you're gonna be late pulling into 109th Street!"

The aged man hunched over the controls as though a part of them, made a noise that fell unrecognized over the growl and rumble of the train.

"You got the grumps, eh?" said Larue making as if to playfully push the motorman.

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV



"Don't do that, Jack," said the engineer. "I tol' you when I'm running this here train . . ."

"Aw, you're as old and grouchy as the el," said Jack. "Soon they'll come along and

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pull you down. The old man stiffened at that. The two said no more for a while.

"What would I do?" said Larue half to himself, peering out over the tracks as they ran up to the train in widening twin lines, only to fall away under the floor of the coach.

"What would I do?" Larue repeated. "Me, I'd have to find a new way to get over to the foundry and back. This has been good enough for me for ten years. And what about you?" he turned his head and laughed at the old man. "You were here when I started on the run. Guess you've been here since the el. Take her down and they'd take old Pete Nevers down too, eh?"

Nevers was sitting like a ramrod. The train coasted off the bridge and flashed itself ungracefully around another curve.

"Never mind, Pete," said the laborer. "Can't do without the el, can we," and he laughed off down the aisle as the cars slowed down for the 109th Street station.

HIS words were little less than prophetic; a forewarning in these days when cities everywhere were doing without els. For it was at lunch time several weeks later that a casually turned paper in the hands of a fellow worker caught Larue's eye.

"Hey, wait a minute! Let me see that, Eddie, will yuh?"

"Huh?"

"Geeze, what do ya know! They're going to pull down the old West River Bridge el. Now how do they expect me to get to work!"

Eddie laughed. "Swim across ya dope!"

Larue read the article all the way through. It seemed they were going to use the rails for scrap iron; the cars were to be sent to another part of the country where they were needed more.

Bus service across the bridge would be instituted.

That evennig coming home on the el, Jack dug his boot into the door of the engineer's compartment. He was feeling the three drinks in him gulped down since the five o'clock whistle. When there was no answer to the third knock, he jerked the door open.

"Pete, I see they're going to pull down this el!"

The old man shook his head and then turned slightly to look at the foundry worker.

Jack went on, "That's what they say. I saw it in the paper. They're going to pull it down and we'll be taking busses across."

"They'll never stop the el," the old man rasped. "A thing like this, it ain't like a dog you can shoot or an old car you can throw in a junk heap. It's alive, I tell you! They can't kill it!"

Jack started at the vehemence in the old motorman's voice.

"Get out of here," the engineer said suddenly. "Get out of here, ya—"

Larue, taken aback, stood in the front of the car for a moment.

"Why, you old devil!" he came back. "What's got into you? You're scared, eh? You're scared because they're going to take down this rotten old el. Yeh, because you know when the el comes down, Nevers, you're finished, too. You ain't no good without it, are you? I know that. Nothing else you can do!" The laborer slammed the compartment door and departed.

That night in his little room on Nestor Street, Larue's conscience won through the liquor. He felt remorseful about old Pete Nevers. After all, he'd known the old man for years. Nothing too chummy, mind you, for Nevers kept everybody sort of at arm's length, but he had ridden the old man's train for what seemed like ages. Of course, it was tough to have them pulling down the el, taking away your means of livelihood, Pete. All of a sudden, Larue got the idea he must see Nevers. That was it. He knew the old man lived across the river near the desolate el yards where the old tired trains waited, some for eternity, others newer, for the next day, those next days that now were limited. Larue pulled on his jacket and barged down the stairs into the street.

It was dark as he headed for the el station. On the platform at 109th he waited, vaguely wondering why he was doing this, and then thinking over a whole chain of circumstances, little kindnesses Nevers had done, money he'd lent Larue . . . and not all of it paid back the foundry worker recalled guiltily.

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It always amazed Larue. The rest of the el workers were chronic complainers. "Hardly enough to keep your face fed," was their line. Nevers was not one to complain. Maybe a man like that could find something else. Certainly he was reliable. Larue considered the opportunities in his foundry. Watchman, or something. That was it!

A train rumbled into the station and Larue boarded it. This wouldn't be one of Nevers' runs. He'd made his last trip and was already through. The elevated scraped its way out of 109th and poked along between the glaringly lighted tenements and finally onto the West River Bridge. The night was warm, and Larue poked his bare forearm out the window, letting the hottish breeze nudge it as the train reached the peak of the bridge middle and then started down toward the opposite end. Beyond was the West River stop, and then several minutes away was the Fender Street stop. Larue got off. He'd been up to Never's place once before.

HE WALKED along the still, dark streets until he came to a dingy building, even older and more run-down than his own. He mounted the steps to the third floor and knocked on the door.

"Come in," said the old man's voice, and Larue went inside.

"Ah, my friend," said the motorman.

"Hello, Pete," said the foundry worker nervously. "I had to come over. Sorry about getting sore this afternoon. That was very dumb of me. After all, I know the time you've been in this business, it's kinda tough to have them take away your living, but—" he brightened, "I bet you can find plenty else. I was even thinking about the foundry. . . ."

"Jack," said the old motorman raising a hand, "don't worry about me or the el."

"Damnit, I don't care about the el," said Larue. "I just want to help you tie in to something else."

Nevers shook his head quietly. "I can't never leave the el," he stated simply.

Larue took some gum out of his pocket, bit into a piece and offered one to the old man.

"No thanks. Nice of you to come, Larue, but you see it's not so simple as me just changing jobs. It's like, well, like taking one of those cars and doing something else with it. I'm kinda the el, that's all."

Larue's glance took in the bare room. Poor old fellow, probably didn't have enough to eat as it was. There wasn't a sign of food anywhere.

"I just wanted you to know how it was, Pete."

He crossed to the motorman and stuck out his hand. The old man grasped it appreciatively in a strong grasp. His handshake was surprisingly steel-like as he shook his head again and said: "I don't worry. If the el, she goes, my troubles are over all the same."

Larue wrinkled his head perplexedly.

"I'd like to see if we couldn't do something for you at the foundry."

The old man disengaged his hand from the laborer's and put it heavily on Larue's shoulder.

"Thanks, lad," he said, "thanks, but I won't be needing anything."

Larue groped his way down the stairs and out into the street, feeling that he hadn't accomplished very much. There was a chillness that he carried with him as he walked toward the Fender Street station. He remembered how very cold the old man's hand had been. Oh well, he'd done his best.

He shrugged and mounted the steps to the elevated platform. On the way home, from force of habit he stood in the very front of the first car as it rocked back across the river. But Larue found himself more and more concerned with the old man despite his unsatisfactory visit. His hands felt the metal sides of the car, and the coldness of the steel reminded him of the old man's handshake. He shook his head. Nevers probably wasn't any too well.

NOT many days later, Jack boarded the el and saw somebody outside Nevers compartment at the head of the train. Another elderly gentleman, he was, with a frayed el-line coat and a heavy gold chain across his vest. Larue shrugged to himself. Even the conductors would be in a tough spot when they pulled down the old structure. As the cars neared Jack's station, he pushed forward to say hello to Pete. The

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other elderly man looked at him closely but seemed to accept him on Nevers' warm welcome.

"Well," said the conductor, whose name was Philpot, "looks like we'll all be looking for something new."

Pete shook his head with that same dogged stiffness that Larue had noticed before.

"Sure," the foreman of his foundry told Jack, "sure Larue, we can use a reliable old codger around here. We just lost two men from the watchman detail."

That night Larue went again to Pete's lodgings to break the good news. Instead of Nevers, he found the aged conductor, Philpot.

"Haven't seen him," said the old employee. "You know, Larue, he spends more and more time down at the yards just sitting. . . . Funny, ain't it? Yup, sitting in the empty el cars."

Larue scratched his head: "Well, what are you doing over here?"

"Ohhh," the old conductor laughed, "I've kinda moved in here with Pete. You know the el ain't so high these days, boy. Not much money, and looks like even that was going to end when they start gouging and cutting and pulling us all to pieces."

Larue leaned against the door as Philpot began reminiscing.

"Yup, the iron horse on stilts they used to call us. Those were the days when the el was the way to go places. Not all your fancy damn underground trains and busses and all that. You took the el, mister, or you didn't go."

"Yeah," said Jack, "Yeah, but don't waste time worrying about that, Mr. Philpot. You fellows got to get out and get something new."

"Mebbe, mebbe not," said the conductor. "I don't mind working, mind you. I never been one to look off center at work, but Pete, young fella, he worries me. This is getting him down. Since I moved in here—it's been a few days now—he hasn't et a thing." He paused, and then cackled as a thought occurred to him.

"I think he's living on that same juice as he sucks up into his train. He gets his nourishment sitting there at the throttle. No sir, haven't seen him et a thing. 'Course he never was the kind of fella who brought the stuff in his pockets and munched away on the job. I never seen him do that in all the years I've worked with him. But a man can't live on nothing, mister. Maybe it's like I say. It's the el power that keeps him going."

Philpot waved his hand under Larue's face, and Jack noticed the worn blue uniform coat.

"No sirree, you can tell me about your other jobs and I'll say thank you and perhaps I'll take 'em and perhaps I won't, but it tain't no use with Pete. He won't take anything else."

"But what'll he do?" persisted Jack. "I think I can work something over at the foundry. Watchman job. Pretty good pay."

Philpot leaned close. "Don't worry about him, mister. He'll get along all right. You know he swears he'll stay with the el."

"Aw, that's silly," said Jack. "What's the use of bucking the facts. The el's going to be blasted and pulled down. The paper knows it, I know it, you know it. You fellas will have to get something else or you'll starve."

Old Philpot cackled. "Don't worry, young fella. Pete lives without eating, and anyway, he says he's staying with the el."

Jack turned to go.

"Now don't get uppity, Larue. I calculated you might tell me a bit more about the job."

"Well, I'd really thought about Pete," said Jack from the door, "and it doesn't look like he's coming in."

"Never can tell," said the conductor. "He might be here most any time. Watchman, did you say?"

"Yeah," said Jack, thinking by now that the other man was probably a bit touched.

"That's fine," said Philpot, "I could do something like that."

Jack set his jaw loyally. "I'm telling you, Mr. Philpot, I was thinking of Pete."

"No, young fellow," said the conductor, then lowered his voice. "Here, let me show you something."

THE old man hobbled to a very old trunk with patched leather handles at either end and a lock that was rusted with age. Quickly a nailfile appeared in his hand and

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he dexterously puried at the lock. The trunk top yielded and he pulled it back.

"Look," he said. Jack leaned forward and peered into the interior curiously.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it's a lot of metal —a lot of old metal parts!"

"Sure," said Philpot triumphantly. "You can see he's swiped levers and bars and facings off the el. Now that isn't the kind of man you want to be watchman!"

Larue was astonished.

"But why? Why would he take all that useless junk?"

"You can sell junk," suggested Philpot waggling his head.

Just then there was an abrupt thud at the door. The metallic rasp of a key, and the next thing Peter Nevers himself stood in the entrance.

The three men stood silent for a moment, and then the motorman crossed quickly to the trunk crashing the lid down with his hand. He turned accusing eyes on Philpot and Larue, eyes steely black with hatred. Larue stood there almost as a spectator. At first it seemed funny and then the vehemence of the man penetrated. Philpot was evidently in terror and he trembled and inched his way across to the door. Larue kept looking at the conductor to do the explaining, and when none was forthcoming, he turned to Pete himself and said simply:

"We just opened it up, Pete. Sorry. I had something I wanted to tell you about a job—"

Nevers raised a long, rigid arm until it pointed at the door in semaphore fashion.

"Get out!" he ordered. "Get out of here, both of you. Going through my things!"

He turned on Larue.

"And as for your job," Nevers said, "I don't need it!"

"What'll you do?" said the foundry worker.

"Stay with the el," growled Pete and started menacingly toward them, his big old hands spread with obvious intention. The two ducked into the hall and headed down the stairs.

"Whew!" said Philpot, "guess he didn't like that."

"It's your fault," Larue reproached. "You shouldn't have nosed into his things. That's what bothered him. He probably thought nobody knew. That was a damn fool thing to do!"

Philpot bristled: "I only wanted to show you. He shouldn't have got so sore. I meant no harm."

"It was your fault," Larue was stubborn.

The two headed out into the street, and Philpot slowed Larue's long lanky stride down, clutching at his sleeve.

"How about that watchman's job?"

"Go to the foundry and find out for yourself," disgustedly advised the laborer.

"Aw, be a good fellow!"

"I didn't look that up for you," persisted Jack.

"I don't know why you should kick. He doesn't want it," hissed Philpot, digging his fingers into the young man's arm. "Now I'll tell you something, mister. Pete ain't quite all right. He isn't exactly like other folks am. Me," Philpot shrugged again, "some folks think I'm getting a bit touched," and he thumped his forehead grinningly. "Silly, ain't it? But Pete, mister," his face became all seriousness again, "Pete is sort of touched all over. I'm telling you, he's not the same as us. I wouldn't want him watching anything of mine!"

Without another word Jack walked away, unmindful of the other's pleas.

Larue didn't notice either of the old el employees again until the momentous day when the el was to support its last load, the last trip through the stations and across the river, for then the old rusting cars were to be nuzzled into their final resting place in the yards and the rails were to be torn up immediately for other, more vital usages.

THE el train that last trip was packed with dignitaries and reporters, the Mayor, and other notables, but still Jack managed to get aboard. There was much excitement, and the Sanitation Department band played bright, hopeful airs on the 109th Street platform. This depressed Larue even more than he had expected to be affected by this last trip. He wondered why the death of something should be celebrated by a band, and a poor one at that, playing off-key military marches. It seemed unfair. Taps maybe, like they do over a dead hero. A bugle and some guns fired off. Damnit, he was going to miss the old rattler.

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He reached into his hip pocket as best he could in the crowd and felt reassuringly of the bottle cached there. The train jerked to a start and there were huzzahs from the small crowd on the platform. The Sanitation band tooted enthusiastically, its horns and inexact melody blaring off into the distance as the train put worn ties between itself and the starting point.

Larue cautiously began to edge his way forward. Between cars he made himself small, reached into his hip and got the bottle there up to his lips. He took a good enough swig to half empty the precious Scotch, then with more elan he shouldered his way forward again.

Slowly, as though reluctant to complete its last journey, as though clinging to every moment, every familiar squeak and rattle, as though caressing for the last time each inch of used and faithful track, the el cars nosed their way around serpentine bends and clickitied out onto the West River Bridge. Pedestrians waved from the bridge way, Jack noted as he peered out the side windows. He also noted that crews were already standing by to begin the work of demolition. The crowd in the el cars was happy and carefree. Here and there, the foundry worker recognized a face that had crossed back and forth with him many times in the past. He didn't know them beyond a nod or a smile, but they were the veterans who, he felt, could sense the real tragedy of this thing as he did. The others, the petty officials, the nosing sour reporters, Chief of Police Frost—a man Larue recognized by his pictures, large-jowled, blank of expression despite the smile frozen on his face—all these did not belong. The el to them was a source of revenue or a cause of lack of revenue, the source of a story, or just a responsibility. For all of them, its iron and steel frame and heart and guts could be wrenched and torn asunder and hauled elsewhere to be scalded and molded into new unrecognizable forms.

Larue finished the rest of his Scotch, picked up in spirit correspondingly, and reached the front of the foremost car, all about the same time. Some of the joy-riding passengers had pulled open the windows and were looking curiously out. Larue stuck his head through and looked back the way they'd come. Already, like the wake of a speedy motor launch coming together in the distance, little ants of men had flung themselves from either side upon the track. Even at the steadily increasing distance, Larue could see the morning sun glinting on a swung pick or raised crowbar. He pulled his head in as the train rattled off the bridge ramp. A couple of florid-faced, straw-hatted men in the back of the car, with construction buttons on, started a few bars of Casey Jones, but the song died a self-conscious death. Larue looked at them with contempt. Construction, bah. Destruction, that's what it was.

He nodded at an old-time passenger he knew and lurched forward against Pete's door. The train was slowing as he leaned against the compartment and pulled at the knob.

"Hello, Pete," he mumbled as the door opened. There was Nevers sitting as ever, hunched and intense over his controls. Nevers said nothing.

THERE were more people at the Fender station. Some little school children were lined up on one side of the platform. As the train pulled in, they waved the small flags in their hands and started to scream. Larue cursed and turned back to Pete.

"It's terrible, isn't it? All this noise!"

He wanted to slap the old man on the back, but Nevers stared intently ahead. A few more people got on at Fender. A few got off. The run now was to the station in the yards where the el cars had made their home for so many years.

Larue spoke several times to Pete and still got no reply. The whiskey fumes in his brain befuddled him. He knotted his fists into balls. He became slowly angry, angriness that made him want to reach over and shake the imperturbable Nevers.

"Whazza matter, Pete? You sore at me about something? Aw, snap out of it. I'm even going to pay you that ten bucks I owe you soon." Larue giggled idiotically.

The train clattered on at increased speed and the hubbub of the passengers behind rose and fell.

"Now Pete," said Larue, "you're not going to high-hat your old friend, are you? That's no way to treat me."

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He reached out and touched Nevers' shoulder.

The motorman turned at that, and for the first time spoke, his eyes full on the laborer's face.

"Get out," he said between closed teeth.

At that, Larue saw red. Without thinking, he aimed a lusty punch in the direction of the engineer's body. He let fly, and as he connected, felt the shock of impact through the back of his hand and up his arm, but Nevers wasn't hurt. With his free hand, the motorman shoved Larue away viciously. The foundry worker crashed heavily into the opposite side of the aisle. Nevers' compartment door slammed and there was the click of a lock. Larue sputtered and pulled himself upward, helped by one of the old-time passengers and a bored reporter who saw in the antics of the drunk some release from the monotony of this final el ride.

"I'm all right," insisted Larue, shaking off his helpers. "Lemme alone." He shook his head. He felt bewildered and dazed by his fall and the liquor. Before him loomed the unreassuring visage of Chief of Police Frost. Larue waved his hand and insisted again: "I'm all right. Lemme alone."

The train docilely began to slow for the yard. The last station was ahead. One of the reporters tried knocking at the motorman's compartment, pounding with his fist and then shaking his head dourly and slapping the pad and pencil he had in his hand back into his pocket.

"He's a devil," said Larue. Don't go near him, fella."

The reporter smirked and headed back along the aisle. The train came to a shuddering stop and Larue found himself carried along with the outpouring passengers. He noted a foreman of the elevated line and old Conductor Philpot standing near the front of the train. Walking down the steps was a feat. When he reached the bottom, everything became increasingly hazy. He headed for the nearest bar and threw himself into the wooden seat of a little cubicle. Beers added to the Scotch made him sleepy, and his last act consisted of waving a five-dollar bill at the disapproving barkeep.

Unaccountable time later, Jack woke up [illegible]nch across the street from the tavern. [illegible]t gingerly of the throbbing lump on the back of his head and his emotions flamed up in anger at Pete. His shoulder was sore too where he had been shoved into the side of the el car by the motorman.

Larue got laboriously to his feet. He staggered uncertainly back across the street and headed into the tavern again, but as he crossed the threshold, the barkeep spotted him and started lumbering forward with a meaningful jerk of the head.

"Look, Bud, I had a hard enough time gettin' you outta here before!"

Larue turned around: "All right, all right, just wanted to know what time it was."

The barkeep yelled out at him: "Stay out of here, you bum!"

The foundry worker trudged along the dark streets. The cool summer air lapped at his hair and cleared his brain of some of its alcoholic vagueness. An illuminated clock on a jeweler's window showed that it was 9:30. Good lord, he'd been out for hours! That blow on the head Nevers had caused him—temper flared up in the man and his footsteps became sure. Even in his befuddled state he found Nevers' place quickly and mounted the steps, his anger a hard swollen something within him. His fists knotted into tight balls . . . mumbling, he climbed the stairs to Pete Nevers' room. He rattled at Nevers' door but there was no answer. He was about to turn away when a noise from within attracted his attention.

SO NEVERS was in there, was he, hiding from him! He pounded again at the door. Still no response. Maddened, the laborer put his shoulder to the door and forced the cheap lock. The panel flew inward and Larue lurched into the chamber, his hands out in front of him aggressively. Then he saw the figure on the floor near the bed.

"Hey you," Jack muttered in surprise. He came closer. It was Philpot! The old man was white as the plaster wall behind him. There was blood oozing thickly from a cut on his head.

"Philpot, what happened? You're hurt!"

The old man raised a gnarled talon of a hand and waved it weakly.

"Nevers," he gasped. "He's crazy. He ain't human!"

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"Nevers!" gritted Larue. "He hit you too, huh? Yeah, he swung on me this morning in the el, the dirty—!"

"Wait, Larue," said the old conductor weakly, "the man's gone mad. He's a killer. He ain't human. And he's headed back to the yards. Call the police, Larue. He's going back for no good, I tell ya. I tried to stop him and look what it did me!"

The scene had sobered Larue. Plainly, old Nevers had gone out of his head.

"I'll get him! I'll go after him myself."

"No," choked the old man, shaking his head painfully. "Won't do, Larue. Got to get the police right away."

"Aw, police," said Larue disdainfully. "I'll find a doctor for you and head to the yards myself.

"Larue," said the old man, "you've got to call the cops right away. Larue, come closer." The old man's voice sunk to a whisper. It was plain he was losing strength fast. The foundry worker bent over the old el employee, his ear close to the man's mouth. Philpot whispered to him, his words barely audible. Larue straightened, aghast, and he wheeled and almost ran from the room.

"I'll get a doctor for you," he called back.

He ran downstairs three at a time and out into the street. Two and a half blocks of running brought him to a policeman. He told the officer the bare details and then took off again in the direction of the el yards.

Finally he reached the stairs leading to the elevated's burial ground. He sprinted up the steps and looked around. Everything seemed quiet. But where was the watchman? As far as he could see were silent sentinels of cars, standing in somber lines of two and three and four. He cursed his lack of matches or any other light as he picked his way along the rotting ties. Gradually his eyes became more accustomed to the dark. Then, suddenly, he came upon a body sprawled against the base of the platform. It was one of the guards. Even to the inexperienced eye, the man no longer possessed that indefinable spark called life. The feeling of death was here and everywhere in these yards now. The watchman had been bludgeoned to death, Larue saw. His head was marked with many blows such as the one Philpot had received.

LARUE got up from his scrutiny. The pit of his stomach tingled and his body felt dampish. That crazy, wicked Nevers! By god, he'd get him. So he was a killer! He had shoved, him, Jack Larue, and he'd killed one, maybe two. But where to look in this maze of silent black coaches squatting everywhere on rusty rails dreaming of the past?

The problem was solved suddenly for him. To his right, several tracks away, the metallic jerk of an el starting shocked him. The headlamp lit up, and against the light-reflected back, Larue could see a three-car train moving slowly along parallel to the platform he was on, toward the switch that opened onto the now-condemned line. Ghostlike the whole scene was, incredible as some distorted, fevered dream. For there seemed no life here but Larue and the remote, twinkling stars above. The train that moved could not, should not be real. It was a trick of his imagination. It was the liquor he had consumed. This yard, these cars were dead, dead as the watchman who lay crumpled over the platform.

Yet even as he thought these things, Larue sprinted forward. He headed across the yard, alternately leaping and stumbling over tracks. Ahead, luring him on with a peculiar, horrible, and magical magnetism was the squeaking, rumbling thing gathering speed, its three funereal black cars sliding wraithlike through the yards. Larue was close by now. He grabbed at a side rail and missed. It was Nevers he knew running the train. Nevers who'd killed, but most of all, who'd pushed him, Jack Larue. People didn't push Larue. The anger flowed back into him and charged blood and energy into his lagging legs. He sprinted mightily and caught the rail at the end of the last car. He pulled himself upward and then lay panting on the back platform. His head still throbbed where Nevers had shoved him earlier that day.

With a series of ominous jerks the train gained speed and Larue watched the black ties flash out from under the belly of the car. Not until then did the impossib[illegible] of his situation strike him. The trai[illegible]

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going too fast by now for him to get off . . . running a trip that had never been meant, for the el was no more after noon that day. This unscheduled run was sheer madness. Suddenly, with horror, the memory of the demolition crew on the bridge came back to Larue. Good God, by now a lot of those bridge rails would have been pried and ripped and loosened. What was Nevers thinking of . . . if it was Nevers!

Larue got to his feet and started into the interior of the coach, feeling his way up the black aisle, his hands guiding him as he touched the worn backs of the seats. The train lurched around a curve and Larue teetered to keep his balance. Never in his years of riding the elevated had it traveled so fast, of that he was sure. Lights from houses they passed flickered feebly through the dirty glass windows and the seat backs took on the sepulchral outlines of ghostly monsters. He forced himself onward and gained the division between car number three and number two.

Looking ahead along the aisle, he could see through the open front the swathe cut by the headlight. Lord, there was something eerie about this. He fought back the whimpering cry that rose in his throat. Suppose no one was aboard! Suppose the train were running by itself. Even as the superstitions of his ancestors threatened to crowd his mind, Larue's reason fought them back. Of course there was a man up there. It was Nevers, he thought. Or maybe it wasn't Nevers. Could be there was some reason for this trip. An inspector going down the line a ways for some purpose. A thin chance, but the idea bolstered him.

HE STUMBLED through the silent middle car and came to the first. His steps slowed, his fears powerful within him again. The car grew brighter around him as the train thundered into a more brightly lit section. The Fender Street station loomed ahead. But desolate tonight. No persons watching, no lines of children with flags, no band, no dignitaries. Only loneliness. They flashed through the station and out. As the el thundered along in its cavern between buildings, here and there Larue fleetingly glimpsed a face at a tenement window, a person gesticulating.

These people knew the el. They had lived with it for years just as he had, lived with its noise and rattle and dirt, and they knew it had died at noon that day, died forevermore, and yet here was this monster ghost thundering again, this magic symbol of the railroad on stilts that refused to die. He could tell from some of the flash glances that they were startled, disbelieving what they saw—a yellow finger of light and then the rumbling clattering black train following the thin cone of brilliance, speeding through the night on the condemned el. And they knew as he knew that the train must stop, for men had killed the creature called the el. They had cut at it and torn at it and broken its structure. Larue's mouth went dry. Thin factory funnels, gray in the night, loomed past outside.

From that he knew they weren't many blocks from the ramp that led up onto the bridge. And the bridge tracks, he knew, were already in a state of partial demolition. He staggered forward, then again the car swayed beneath him. As he edged closer to the motorman's compartment at the very front and right of the first car, the fear that no one would be within that compartment took him by the throat and seemed almost to shake him in rhythm to the swaying of the car.

With a great effort of control, he threw himself ahead, wrenching at the motorman's door. He pulled it open and the words burst forth then.

"Oh, Pete! God, man, I'm glad to see you! Look, you've got to pull this thing down. You know the tracks are down up ahead!"

Gone was the picture of the watchman lying back there in the yards, for here instead of nobody, instead of some ghost, was old Nevers crouched reassuringly as always over his controls.

"Pete," said Larue again, grabbing the man's craglike shoulder, "slow her down. The bridge's not far away."

But the old man just sat there, his eyes staring ahead.

The moment of relief was gone for Jack Larue. The foundry worker cursed and pleaded. He wedged himself into the tiny compartment with the motorman. He screamed at Nevers.

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"For God's sake, man, don't you understand? There's no more track up ahead. I saw them pulling it up myself. You'll wreck her, I tell you, Pete. You've got to listen to me."

The el jiggled balefully around the corner and then Larue sensed rather than saw its upward pull. The grade leading toward the ramp! Larue screamed then and looked ahead. The yellow cone of light fumbled through the darkness and then picked out the ramp far ahead. Larue looked away and at Nevers again.

"You're crazy, man," he screamed. "Stop her, Nevers, for God's sake!"

BUT the motorman sat his seat with steely determination, The light that fell in irregular squares in the compartment seemed to strike and reflect from Nevers. There was a quality about the man that terrified Larue. Suddenly he flung himself across the motorman's body and lurched frantically at the controls. He got one hand on the brake and the other hand closed over the long metal lever that controlled the speed. His arms and back strained with the frenzied effort to move them against Nevers' strength and will. He could not. The old man possessed a superhuman steel-like strength. The metallic resonance of the steel el structure suddenly gave way to the ominous hollow-like rumble of the ramp. The wooden cross-beams beneath the ties echoed back the thumping of the train like evil demons pounding in derision. Larue redoubled his efforts and each split second seemed an eternity of fear and struggle and decision.

He jerked his hands from the levers and turned them on Nevers. He struck the man with all the strength of his hard workman's body. His hands cracked and bled and broke against the rocklike unyielding creature before him. His flayings caught the whistle cord and the banshee hoot of the train joined in mournful discord to Larue's own scream. His pleas were incoherent now. He must kill this man before him or he would die!

The ramp vibrated hollowly beneath the coach. The laborer shot a fearful glance ahead up the ladder of light that groped along the ties in the distance. The rails were still there as far as he could see, but out in the middle of the West River Bridge, out over the swirling dark water dozens of feet below, there were no tracks and the train would suddenly be out of its element, helpless, forsaken. The image of this morning lighted up in Larue's mind. Looking back out of a window as the el rumbled the other way across the West River . . . looking back and seeing the crews coming together with their tools attacking the rails and destroying them section by section. That was ahead, he knew. The incline grew steeper and the echoes from the ramp fell away to become deeper, longer. They were on the bridge!

Larue started to back out of the motorman's compartment. He looked ahead, and there, oh God, there he could at last see the shining reflection of the rails was broken, somewhere out there ahead near center-bridge. With ghastly suddenness he felt a hand of iron close on his wrist and turned away from the sight ahead. Nevers had turned his head and was looking at him. A glinting skull-like visage leering with evilness. The face was like an old carving.

"Pete, for God's sake!" Larue screamed. "We've got to jump. It's our only chance."

But the look from the other man told him what Nevers meant to do, and Larue's only thought desperately was to get free, to hurl himself out the front to one side. The space he still had to go, the seconds he had to fight with, both were shortening.

Larue hurled his body backwards, clawing at the arm that imprisoned his own. He then realized suddenly what he was up against. This was a monster—no creature of God, of flesh and blood. On either side was the blackness of empty air. Somewhere far down there was the water. Ahead, much too near now, was the beginning of the destroyed sections. Rails pulled aside, twisted and bent, missing. Larue charged forward then, straight at the creature who opposed him, his hard body rammed against the other. Every muscle developed from years at the foundry came into play. The thing before him gave ground slightly to counter this new assault, then Jack's free hand came down in a wicked slash over the hand that held him. He reversed his direction and lurched backward toward the opening in the front of the train. His monster opponent, surprised, came with him for a few

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ing, precious feet. Larue gained the front of the car vestibule and levered his shoulder around the coping. The guard chain across the front broke. The thing named Nevers groaned. There was a sudden scream of twisting metal, a distinct snapping sound, and Larue was free. The least horror of the moment was that Nevers' hand unaccountably had come with him as though wrenched from its very socket. He was staggering, flying out onto the side to fall clear in a somersaulting, bouncing heap along the right of way on the bridge. The train rumbled on past.

Jack raised himself up. He was still clutching in his hand the weighty something. The train was silhouetted for a splendid moment against the lights of the city as it charged relentlessly onto No Man's Land where tracks had been razed. With reeling senses the foundry worker watched the spectacle. The train suddenly bucked. The first car went up in the air as though it had gone over a gigantic bump. Then it slid sideways at incredible speed, dragging the other two along. All this seemed soundless to Larue. The el glided sideways then and tumbled off the bridge. Only then did he become aware of the sounds. The awful shrieking and grinding of iron upon iron, the crash of impact, the rending noise of rubbing, protesting metal, the bump and whining, and then from below a long-drawn out splash . . . and silence!

For a time he lay there too stunned to do other than look weakly around him on the ghost-like bridge. Then he got to his feet. He forced himself to the side of the structure and looked over. The water below was running silently, covering its loot without trace. Trembling violently Jack stumbled on across the bridge and found his way home, still clutching a bulky weight in his hand. This horror—something he was too dazed to look at and appraise, afraid that it was what he most feared, no more incredible than anything else this evening—Nevers' hand!

BY NOW, sirens were sounding in the streets below and Larue knew that rescue squads were on the way to the piers. So much had happened that evening that the foundry worker's mind was numb. Still hypnotized with horror, he dropped the something he had sneaked home with him from the bridge in a corner and hurriedly covered it with newspapers. Then he went down into the street again, down to a waterfront excited and packed now with eager, watching people. In addition to the apparatus at the wharves, there were police launches and small craft of all types cruising around in the river directly beneath the bridge. On the span itself he could see figures moving. Searchlights were shining down onto the water: Larue watched for hours as people around him came and went, and as dawn finally streaked the sky to the east. The boats drifted and crossed in eccentric lines around the center of the river, their white wakes criss-crossing over the grave of the el train.

Full morning came and Larue reluctantly left to have breakfast in a little restaurant and then headed for work. Somehow he got through the day. He bought all the evening papers. "A mentally deranged employee of the el line," it is stated, "stole a train last evening after fatally beating his roommate and a guard, both employees of the el, and ran the train of three cars off the West River Bridge where demolition of the tracks had already started. Police stated that they expected Nevers' body would be recovered when wreckage of the el could be raised."

Larue worked his time at the foundry in a daze. For him, the river had a morbid, fateful fascination. He was on hand when the smashed cars of the el train began to come up, caught and drawn up laboriously with grappling hooks. But Nevers was not found. Still the police trawled the river, for, as was pointed out in the newspapers, the engines were supplied with an automatic device that caused the train to stop of itself if the motorman left the controls. Somehow, the press speculated, Nevers' body might have wedged itself through a window and was even now somewhere at the bottom of the river.

Larue knew at last, and he lived with his terrible secret, not wishing to confirm it, clinging to the doubt, slim though it was, that he was crazy, that his memory of that night was wrong. A nightmare delusion, although the livid bruises still apparent on his body testified otherwise. Days passed,

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and the foundry worker shunned the corner of his room. After several weeks, the police and press admitted grudgingly that possibly Nevers had escaped on the bridge just before the train went off. Police nets were spread for the deranged murderer and Larue watched the papers closely. More time passed and nothing new was uncovered.

Finally, desperately, the foundry worker went to the corner of his room one night and dug out the object which had rested there for so many weeks under an increasing pile of newspapers. He took what he found there in trembling hands, horror-stricken, and headed through the foggy darkness for the wharves, the bundle under his arm. He got to the water's edge and stood for a moment looking around to see if he was observed. Satisfied, he took the paper covering off and held Nevers' arm in his hands. Something the dead Philpot had said came back to him poignantly. No, the motorman hadn't been human.

And Larue dropped the metal throttle lever he'd been holding into the water to join the rest of Pete Nevers of the el.

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The Jar

By RAY BRADBURY

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

IT WAS one of those things they keep in a jar in the tent of a sideshow on the outskirts of a little, drowsy town. One of those pale things drifting in alcohol plasma, forever dreaming and circling, with its peeled dead eyes staring out at you and never seeing you. It went with the noiselessness of late night, and only the crickets chirping, the frogs sobbing off in the moist swampland. One of those things in a big jar that makes your stomach jump like it does when you see an amputated arm in a laboratory vat.

Charlie stared back at it for a long time.

A long time, his big raw hands, hairy on the roofs of them, clenching the rope that kept back curious people. He had paid his dime and now he stared.

It was getting late. The merry-go-round drowsed down to a lazy mechanical tinkle. Tentpeggers back of a canvas smoked and cursed over a poker game. Lights switched out, putting a summer gloom over the carnival. People streamed homeward in cliques and queues. Somewhere, a radio flared up,

Everything and anything it was . . . death and the night, and the pallid moist things of the sea . . .

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then cut, leaving Louisiana sky wide and silent with stars peppering it.

There was nothing in the world for Charlie but that pale thing sealed in its universe of serum. Charlie's loose mouth hung open in a pink weal, teeth showing, eyes puzzled, admiring, wondering.

Someone trotted in the shadows behind him, small beside Charlie's giant tallness. "Oh," said the shadow, coming into the light-bulb glare. "You still here, bud?"

"Yeah," said Charlie, irritated, his thoughts were touched.

The carny-boss appreciated Charlie's curiosity. He nodded at his old acquaintance in the jar. "Everybody likes it; in a peculiar kinda way, I mean."

Charlie rubbed his long jawbone. "You—uh—ever consider selling it?"

The carny boss' eyes dilated, then closed. He snorted. "Naw. It brings customers. They like seeing stuff like that. Sure."

Charlie made a disappointed, "Oh."

"Well," considered the carny-boss, "if a guy had money, maybe—"

"How much money?"

"If a guy had—" the carny-boss estimated, squinting eyes, counting on fingers, watching Charlie as he tacked it out one finger after another. "If a guy had three, four, say, maybe seven or eight—"

Charlie nodded with each motion, expectantly. Seeing this, the carny-boss raised his total, "—maybe ten dollars, or maybe fifteen—"

Charlie scowled, worried. The carny-boss retreated, "Say a guy has *twelve* dollars—" Charlie grinned. "Why, he could buy that thing in that jar," concluded the carny-boss.

"Funny thing," said Charlie, "I got just twelve bucks in my denims. And I been reckoning how looked up to I'd be back down at Wilder's Hollow if I brung home something like this to set on my shelf over the table. The guys would sure look up to me then, I bet."

"*Well,* now, listen here—" said the carny-boss.

The sale was completed with the jar put on the back seat of Charlie's wagon. The horse skittered its hoofs when it saw it, and whinnied.

The carny-boss glanced up with an expression of, almost, relief. "I was tired of seeing the thing around. Don't thank me. Lately I been thinking things about it, funny things—don't mind me, I'm just a big-mouth. S'long, farmer!"

Charlie drove off. The naked blue light bulbs withdrew like dying stars, the open dark country night of Louisiana swept in around wagon and horse. The brass merry-go-round clanking faded. There was just Charlie, the horse timing its gray hoofs, and the crickets.

And the jar behind the high seat.

It sloshed back and forth, back and forth. Sloshed wet. And the cold gray thing drowsily slumped against the glass, looking out, looking out, but seeing nothing, nothing, nothing.

Charlie leaned back to pet the lid. Smelling of strange liquor his hand returned, changed and cold and trembling, excited. He was bright scarlet happy about this. *Yes, sir!*

Slosh, slosh, slosh. . . .

IN THE Hollow numerous grass-green and blood-red lanterns tossed dusty light over men huddled, chanting, spitting, sitting on General Store property.

They knew the creak-bumble of Charlie's vehicle and did not shift their raw, drab-haired skulls as he rocked to a halt. Their cigars were nicotine glow-worms crawling from political lips to knee-perches and return-trip. Their voices were frog mutterings in summer night.

Charlie leaned at an eager angle. "Hi, Clem. Hi, Milt."

"Lo, Charlie. Lo, Charlie," they murmured. The political conflict continued. Charlie cut it down the seam:

"I got somethin' here. I got somethin' you might wanna see!"

Tom Carmody's eyes glinted, green in the lamp-light, from the General Store porch. It seemed to Charlie that Tom Carmody was forever installed under porches in shadow, or under trees in shadow, or if in a room in the farthest niche, showing his eyes out at you from his dark. You never knew what his face was doing, and his eyes were always funning you. And every time they looked at you they laughed a different way:

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"You ain't got nothin' we wants ta see, you dumb sheebaw!"

Charlie made a fist with a blunt-knuckle fringe: "Somethin' in a jar," he went on. "Looks kine a like a brain, kine a like a pickled wolf, kine a like—well come look yourself!"

Somebody snicked their cigar into a fall of pink ash and ambled over to look. Charlie grandly elevated the jar-lid, and in the uncertain lantern-light the man's face changed. "Hey, now, what in hell *is* this—"

It was the first thaw of the night. Others shifted lazily upright, leaned forward; gravity pulled them into walking. They made no effort, except to keep one shoe afore the other, to keep from collapsing upon their unusual faces. They circled the jar and contents. And Charlie, first time in his life, seized upon some strategy and clapped the lid down with a glass clatter:

"You want to see more, drop around to my house. It'll be there," he declared, generously.

Tom Carmody spat from out his porch eyrie. "Ha!"

"Lemme see thet again," cried Gramps Medknowe. "Is it a brain?"

Charlie flapped the reins and the horse stumbled into action.

"Come on around! You're welcome!"

"What'll your wife say?"

"She'll kick the tar off our heels!"

But Charlie and wagon were gone over the hill. They stood around, all of them, chewing tongues, squinting after. Tom Carmody swore softly from the porch. . . .

AS CHARLIE climbed the steps of his shack, carrying the jar to its throne in the living room, he thought that from now on the place would be a palace. The incumbent king swam without moving in his private pool, raised, elevated upon his shelf over the table.

This jar was the one thing that dispelled the gray sameness that hung over the place on the swamp-rim.

"What've you got there?"

Thedy's thin soprano turned him from his admiration. She stood in the bedroom door glaring out, her thin body clothed in faded blue gingham, her hair drawn to a drab knot behind red ears. Her eyes were faded like the gingham. "Well," she repeated. "What is it?"

"What does it look like to you, Thedy?"

She took a thin step forward, making a slow indolent pendulum of hips. Her eyes were intent upon the jar, her lips drawing back to show feline milk teeth.

The dead pale thing hung in its serum.

Thedy snapped a dull-blue glance at Charlie, then back to the jar, and swept around quickly to clutch the wall. "It—it looks just like—*YOU*—Charlie!" she shouted hoarsely.

The door slammed behind her!

The reverberation did not disturb the jar's contents. But Charlie stood there, longing after her, neck muscles long, taut, heart pounding frantically, and then after his heart slowed a bit, he talked to the thing in the jar:

"I work the bottom-land to the buttbone ever' year, and she takes the money and rushes off down home visitin' her folks, nine weeks at a stretch. I can't keep holt of her. She and the men from the store make fun of me. I can't help it if I'm not whip smart."

Philosophically, the contents of the jar gave no advice.

"Charlie?"

Someone stood in the door.

Charlie turned, startled, then broke out a grin.

It was some of the men from the General Store.

"Uh—Charlie—we—that is—we thought—well—we came up to have a look at that—stuff—you got in that there jar—"

JULY passed warm, and it was August. For the first time in years, Charlie was happy as tall corn growing after a drought. It was gratifying of an evening to hear boots shushing through the tall grass, the sound of men spitting into the ditch prior to setting foot on the porch, the sound of heavy bodies creaking across it, and the groan of the house as yet another shoulder leaned against its frame door and another voice said, as a hairy arm wiped clean the questioning mouth:

"Kin I come in?"

With elaborate casualness, Charlie'd invite the arrivals in. There'd be chairs, soap-

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boxes for all, or at least carpets to squat on. And by the time crickets were itching their legs into a summertime hummings, and frogs were throat swollen like ladies with goiters belching in the great night, the room would be full to bursting with people from all the bottom lands.

At first nobody would say nothing. The first half hour of such an evening, while people came in and got settled, was spent in carefully rolling cigarettes. Putting tobacco neatly into the rut of brown paper, loading it, tamping it, as they loaded and tamped and rolled their thoughts and fears and amazement for the evening. It gave them time to think. You could see their brain working behind their eyes as they fingered the cigarettes into smoking order.

It was kind of a rude church gathering. They sat, squatted, leaned on plaster walls, and one by one, with reverent awe, they stared at the jar upon its shelf.

They wouldn't stare sudden like. That would've been irreverent. No, they kind of did it slow, casual, as if they were glancing around the room—letting eyes fumble over just *any* old object that happened into their consciousness.

And—just by accident, of course—the focus of their wandering eyes would occur always at the same place. After awhile all eyes in the room would be fastened to it, like pins stuck in some incredible pincushion. And the only sound would be some one sucking a corn-cob. Or the children's barefooted scurry on the porch planks outside. Maybe some woman's voice would come, "You kids git away, now! Git!" And with a giggle like soft, quick water, the bare feet would rush off to scare the bullfrogs.

Charlie would be up front, naturally, on his rocking chair, a plaid quilt under his lean rump, rocking slow, enjoying the fame and looked-up-toedness that came with keeping the jar.

Thedy, she'd be seen way back of the room with the women folks in a bunch like grey grapes, abiding their menfolk.

Thedy looked like she was ripe for jealous screaming. But she said nothing, just watched men tromp into her living room and set at the feet of Charlie staring at this here Holy Grail-like thing, and her lips were set as seven-day concrete and she spoke not a civil word to nobody.

After a period of proper silence, someone, maybe old Gramps Medknowe from Creek Road, would clear the phlegm from his old throat's cavern, lean forward, blinking, wet his lips, maybe, and there'd be a curious tremble in his calloused fingers.

This would cue everyone to get ready for the talking to come. Ears were primed. People settled as much as sows in warm mud after the rain.

GRAMPS looked a long while, measured his lips with a lizard tongue, then settled back and said, like always, in a high thin old man's tenor:

"Wonder what *it* is? Wonder if it's a he or a she or just a plain old *it*? Sometimes I wake up nights, twist on my corn-matting, think about that jar setting here in the long dark. Think about it hangin' in liquid, peaceful and pale like an animal oyster. Sometimes I wake Maw and we both think of it . . ."

While talking, Gramps moved his fingers in a quavering pantomime. Everybody watched his thick thumb weave, and the other heavy-nailed fingers undulate.

". . . we both lay there, thinkin'. And we shivers. May be a hot night, trees sweatin', mosquitoes too hot to fly, but we shivers jest the same, and turn over, tryin' to sleep . . ."

Gramps lapsed back into silence, as if his speech was enough from him, let some other voice talk the wonder, awe and strangeness.

Juke Marmer, from Willows Road, wiped sweat off his palms on the round of his knees and softly said:

"I remember when I was a runnel-nosed gawk, we had a cat who was all the time makin' kittens. Lordamighty, she'd a litter ever time she turned around and skipped a fence—" Juke spoke in a kind of holy softness, benevolent. "Well, we usually gave the kittens away, but when this one particular litter busted out, everybody within walkin' distance had one-two our cats by gift, already.

"—So Ma busied on the back porch with a big gallon glass jar, filling it to the brim with water. It slopped in the sunlight. Ma said, 'Juke, you drown them kittens!' I

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'member I stood there, the kittens mewed, running around, blind, small, helpless and snugly. Just beginning to get their eyes open. I looked at Ma, I said, 'Not *me* Ma! You do it!' But Ma turned pale and said it had to be done and I was the only one handy. And she went off to stir gravy and fix chicken. I—I picked up one—kitten. I held it. It was warm, it made a mewing sound. I felt like running away, not ever coming back."

Juke nodded his head now, eyes bright, young, seeing into the past, making it stark, chiseling it out with hammer and knife of words, smoothing it into horrible bas-relief with his tongue:

"I dropped the kitten into the water.

"He closed his eyes, opened his mouth, gasping for air. I remember how the little white fangs showed, the pink tongue came out, and bubbles with it, in a line, to the top of the water!

"I remember to this day the way that kitten floated after it was all over, drifting around, around, slow and not worrying, looking out at me, not condemnin' me for what I done. But not likin' me, either. Ahhhhh. . . ."

Hearts beat fast. Eyes shifted quickly from Juke to the shelved jar, back to him, up again, a spectators' game, as one sees at a tennis tournament, interest changing from moment to moment, apprehensively.

A pause.

Jahdoo, the black man from Swamp Crick Road, tossed his ivory eyeballs like a dusky juggler in his head. His dark knuckles knotted and flexed—grasshoppers alive.

"You know what thet is? You know, you *know*? That am thee center of Life, sure 'nuff! Lord believe me, it am so!"

SWAYING in a tree-like rhythm, Jahdoo was blown by some swamp wind nobody could see, hear or feel, but himself. His eyeballs went around again, as if loosened from all mooring. His voice needled a dark thread pattern picking up each person by the lobes of their ears and sewing them into one unbreathing design:

"From that, lyin' back in the Middibamboo Sump, all sort o' thing crawl. It put out hand, it put out feet, it put out tongue an' horn an' it grow. Little bitty amoeba, perhap. Then a frog with a bulge-throat fit ta bust! Yah!" He cracked knuckles. "It slobber on up to its gummy joints and it—it AM A MAN! That am the center of creation. That am Middibamboo Mama, from which we all come ten thousand year ago. Believe it!"

"Ten thousand year ago!" reiterated Granny Carnation.

"It am old! Looky it! It donn worra no more. It know better. It hang like pork chop in fryin' fat. It got eye to see with, but it donn blink 'em, they donn look fretted, does they? No, man! It know betta. It know thet we done come from it, and we is going back TO it!"

"What color eyes has it got?"

"Grey."

"Naw, green!"

"What color hair? Brown?"

"Black!"

"Red!"

"No, grey!"

Then Charlie would give his drawling opinion. Some nights he'd say the same thing, some nights not. It didn't matter. When you said the same thing night after night in the deep summer, it always sounded different. The crickets changed it. The frogs changed it. The thing in the jar changed it. Charlie said:

"What if an old man went back into the swamp, or maybe a young child, and wandered around for years and years lost in the drippin' trails and gullies, the wet ravines, in the nights, skin a turnin' pale, and makin' cold and shrivelin' up. Bein' away from the sun he'd keep witherin' away up and up and finally sink into a muck-hole and lay in a kind of—solution, like the maggot mosquito sleepin' in liquid. Why, why—for all we know, this might be someone we know. Someone we passed words with once on a time. For all we know . . ."

A hissing from among the women folks back in the shadows. One woman standing, eyes shining black, fumbling for words. Her name was Mrs. Tridden. She said:

"Lots of little kids run stark naked into the swamp ever year. They runs around and they never comes back. I almost got lost maself. I—I lost my little boy, Foley, that way. You—you DON'T SUPPOSE!!"

Breaths were taken in, snatched through

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nostrils, constricted, tightened. Mouths turned down at corners, bent by grim facial muscles. Heads turned on celery stalk necks, and eyes read her horror and hope. It was in Mrs. Tridden's body, wire-taut, holding onto the wall back of her with straight fingers stiff.

"My baby," she whispered. She breathed it out. "My baby. My Foley! Foley! Foley, is that you? Foley! Foley, tell me, baby, is that YOU!"

Everybody held their breath, turning to see the jar.

THE thing in the jar said nothing. It just stared blind-white out upon the multitude. And deep in raw-boned bodies a secret fear juice ran like spring thaw, and the resolute ice of calm life and belief and easy humbleness was cracked down the middle by that juice and melted away in a gigantic torrent!

"It moved!" someone screamed.

"No, no, it didn't move. Just your eyes playin' tricks!"

"Hones' ta God," cried Juke. "I saw it shift slow like a dead kitten!"

"Hush up, now! It's been dead a long, long time. Maybe since before you was born!"

"He made a sign!" screamed Mrs. Tridden, the mother woman. "That's my baby, my Foley! My baby you got there! Three year old, he was! My baby lost and white in the swamp!"

The sobbing broke out of her, then.

"Now, now, there now, Mrs. Tridden. There now. Set down and stop shakin'. Ain't no more your child'n mine. There, there."

One of the women-folk held her and faded out the sobbing into jerked breathing and a fluttering of her lips in butterfly quickness as the breath stroked over them, afraid.

When all was quiet again, Granny Carnation, with a withered pink flower in her shoulder-length grey hair, sucked the pipe in her trap mouth and talked around it, shaking her head to make the hair dance in the light:

"All this talking and shoving around words. Hah. Like as not we'll never know what it is. Like as not if we could find out, we wouldn't want to know. It's like them magic tricks them magicians do at the show. Once you find the feke, it ain't no more funn' the innards of a jackbob. We come collecting around here every ten nights or so, talking, social like, with something, always something, to talk about. Stands to reason if we found out what the damn thing is there'd be nothing to talk about, so there!"

"Well, damn it to hell!" rumbled a bull voice. "I don't think it's nothin'!"

Tom Carmody.

Tom Carmody standing, as always, in shadow. Out on the porch, just his eyes staring in, his lips laughing at you dimly, mocking. His laughter got inside Charlie like a hornet sting. Thedy had put him up to it, Thedy was trying to undermine Charlie's social life, she was!

"Nothing," joked Carmody, harshly, "in that jar but a bunch of old jelly-fish from Sea Cove, a rottin' and a stinkin' fit to whelp!"

"You mightn't be jealous, Cousin Carmody?" asked Charlie slow.

"Haw!" snorted Carmody. "I jest come around ta watch you dumb nitwits jaw about nuthin'. I gits a kick out of it. You notice I never set foot inside or took part. I'm goin' home right now. Anybody wanna come along with me?"

He got no offer of company. He laughed again, as if this were a bigger joke, how so many people could be so dumb, and Thedy was raking her palms with angry nails back of the room. Charlie felt a twinge of unexpected fear at this.

Carmody, still laughing, rapped off the porch with his high-heeled boots and the sound of crickets took him away.

Granny Carnation gummed her pipe. "Like I was saying before the storm; that thing on the shelf, why couldn't it be sort of—all things? Lots of things. What they call a—gimmle——"

"Symbol?"

"That's it. Symbol. Symbol of all the nights and days in the dead canebrake. Why's it have to be one thing? Maybe it's lots."

And the talking went on for another hour, and Thedy slipped away into the night on the track of Tom Carmody, and Charlie began to sweat. They were up to

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something, those two. They were planning something. Charlie sweated warm all the rest of the evening. . . .

THE meeting broke up late, and Charlie bedded down with mixed emotions. The meeting had gone off well, but what about Thedy and Tom Carmody?

Very late, with certain star coveys shuttled down the sky marking the time as late, Charlie heard the shushing of the tall grass parted by her penduluming hips. Her heels tacked soft across the porch.

She lay soundlessly in bed, cat eyes staring at him. He couldn't see them, but he could *feel* them staring.

"Charlie?"

He waited.

Then he said, "I'm awake."

Then she waited.

"Charlie?"

"What?"

"Bet you don't know where I been, bet you don't know where I been." It was a faint, derisive sing-song in the night.

He waited.

She waited again. She couldn't bare waiting long, though, and continued:

"I been to the carnival over in Cape City. Tom Carmody drove me. We—we talked to the carny-boss, Charlie, we did, we did, we *sure* did." And she sort of giggled to herself, secretly.

Charlie stirred upright on an elbow.

She said, "We found out what it is in your jar, Charlie—" insinuatingly.

Charlie flumped over, hands to ears. "I don't wanna hear."

"Oh, but you gotta hear, Charlie. It's a good joke. Oh, it's rare, Charlie," she hissed.

"Go—away," he said in a low firm voice.

"Unh-unh. No. No, sir, Charlie, Honey. Not until I tell. We talked to the carny-boss and he—he almost died laughin', he said he sold it to some—hick—for twelve bucks. And it ain't worth more than two dollars at most!"

Laughter bloomed in the dark, right out of her mouth, an awful kind of flower with her breath as its perfume.

She finished it, snapping, quick:

"It's just junk, Charlie! Liquid rubber, paper-mache, silk, cotton, chemicals! That's all! Got a metal-framework inside it! That's all! That's all it is, Charlie! That's all," she shrilled in triumph.

He sat up swiftly, ripping sheets apart in big fingers, roaring, tears coming bright on his cheeks:

"I don't wanna hear! Don't wanna hear!" he bellowed over and over.

She teased. "Wait'll everyone hears how fake it is! Won't they laugh! Won't they flap their lungs!"

He caught her wrists. "You ain't—gonna tell them?"

"Ouch, you hurt me!"

"You *ain't* gonna tell them."

"Wouldn't want me known as a liar, would you, Charles?"

He flung her wrists like white sticks into a well:

"Whyncha leave alone? You're dirty! Dirty jealous of everything I do. I took shine off your nose when I brung the jar home. You didn't sleep right until you ruined things!"

She laughed nastily. "Then I *won't* tell everybody," she said.

He caught on to her. "You spoiled *my* fun. That's all that counted. It don't matter if you tell the rest. *I* know. And I'll never have no more fun. You and that Tom Carmody. Him laughin'. I wish I could stop him from laughin'. He's been laughin' for years at me! Well, you just go tell the rest, the other people now—might as well have your fun—"

He strode angrily, grabbed the jar so it sloshed, and would have flung it on the floor, but he stopped, trembling, and let it down softly on the rickety table. He leaned over it, sobbing. If he lost this, the world was gone. And he was losing Thedy, too. Every month that passed she danced further away, sneering at him, funning him. For too many years her hips had been the pendulum by which he reckoned the time of his living. But other men, Tom Carmody, for one, were reckoning time from the same source.

Thedy was standing, waiting for him to smash the jar. Instead, he petted it thoughtfully. He thought of the long good evenings in the past month, those rich evenings of comraderie, conversation woven into the fabric of the room. That, at least, was good, if nothing else.

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He turned slowly to Thedy. She was lost forever to him.

"Thedy, you didn't go to the carnival."

"Yes, I did."

"You're lyin'!"

"No, I'm not."

"They, this jar HAS to have somethin' in it. Somethin' besides the junk you say. Too many people believe there's somethin' in it, Thedy. You can't change that. The carny-man, if you talked with him, lied. Come here, Thedy."

"What you want?" she asked, sullenly.

"Come over here."

"Keep away from me, Charlie."

"I just want to show you something, Thedy." His voice was soft, low and insisting. "Here, kittie, kittie, kittie—HERE KITTIE!"

IT WAS another night, about a week later. Gramps Medknowe and Granny Carnation came, followed by young Juke and Mrs. Tridden and Jahdoo, the colored man. Followed by all the others, young and old, creaking into chairs, each with his or her symbol, though hope, fear and wonder in mind. Each not looking at the shrine, but saying hello softly to Charlie.

They waited for the others to gather. From the shine of their eyes one could see that each saw something different in the jar, something of the life and the pale life after life, and the life in death and the death in life, each with his story, his cue, his lines, familiar, old but new.

Charlie sat alone.

"Hello, Charlie." A glance around, into the empty bedroom. "Where's your wife? Gone off again to visit her folks?"

"Yeah, she run off again to Tennessee. Be back in a couple weeks. She's the darndest one for running off. You know Thedy."

"Great one for ganntin' off, that woman."

Soft voices talking, getting settled, and then, quite suddenly, like a black leopard moving from the dark—Tom Carmody.

Tom Carmody standing outside the door, knees sagging and trembling, arms hanging and shaking at his side, staring into the room. Tom Carmody not daring to enter. Tom Carmody with his mouth open, but not smiling. His lips wet and slack, not smiling. His face pale as chalk, as if it had been kicked with a boot.

Gramps looked up at the jar, cleared his throat and said, "Why, I never noticed so definite before. It's got *blue* eyes."

"It always had blue eyes," said Jahdoo.

"No," whined Gramps. "No, it didn't. It was brown last time we was here." He blinked upward. "And anutther thing—it's got brown hair. Didn't have brown hair before."

"Yes, yes it did," sighed Mrs. Tridden.

"No, it didn't!"

"Yes, it did!"

Tom Carmody, shivering in the summer night, staring at the jar. Charlie, glancing up at it, rolling a cigarette, casually, at peace and calm, very certain of his life and world and thoughts. Tom Carmody, alone, seeing things about the jar he never saw before. *Everybody* seeing what they wanted to see; all thoughts running in a tide of quick rain:

"My baby! My little baby!" screamed the thought of Mrs. Tridden.

"A grain!" thought Gramps.

The colored man jigged his fingers. "Middibamboo Mama!"

A fisherman pursed his lips. "Jellyfish!"

"Kitten! Here kittie, kittie, kittie!" the thoughts drowned clawing in Juke's skull. "Kitten!"

"Everything and anything!" shrilled Granny's weazened thought. "The night, the swamp, the death, the pallid moist things of the sea!"

Silence, and then Gramps said, "I wonder. I wonder. Wonder if it's a he—or a she—or just a plain old *it*?"

Charlie glanced up, satisfied, tampering his cigarette, shaping it to his mouth. Then he looked at Tom Carmody, who would never smile again, in the door. "I reckon we'll never know. Yeah, I reckon we won't." Charlie smiled.

It was just one of those things they keep in a jar in the tent of a sideshow on the outskirts of a little drowsy town. One of those pale things drifting in plasma, forever dreaming, circling, with its peeled, dead eyes staring out at you and never seeing you. . . .

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SUPERSTITIONS AND TABOOS

by Ellis

SELF MUTILATION WAS A FORM OF DEVOTION AMONG THE MAYAS. BLOODLETTING BY PIERCING THE EAR LOBES WAS COMMON, BUT ONE OF THE SEVEREST FORMS OF SELF TORTURE WAS FOR A PENITENT MAYA TO DRAW A BARBED CORD THROUGH HIS TONGUE!

FROGS AND TOADS HAVE ALWAYS HAD A WIDESPREAD REPUTATION AS CUSTODIANS OF RAIN BECAUSE OF THEIR INTIMATE ASSOCIATION WITH WATER.

SOME OF THE INDIANS OF THE ORINOCO BELIEVED THE TOAD TO BE THE GOD OR LORD OF THE WATERS AND ALTHOUGH THEY FEARED KILLING IT, THEY DID NOT HESITATE CONFINING AND BEATING IT WITH A ROD WHEN THERE WAS A DROUGHT!

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The Bat Is My Brother

By ROBERT BLOCH

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

Have you ever wondered why there are not more vampires—for every victim of a vampire becomes one in turn!

IT BEGAN in twilight—a twilight I could not see.

My eyes opened on darkness, and for a moment I wondered if I were still asleep and dreaming. Then I slid my hands down and felt the cheap lining of the casket, and I knew that this nightmare was real.

I wanted to scream, but who can hear screams through six feet of earth above a grave?

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Better to save my breath and try to save my sanity. I fell back, and the darkness rose all around me. The darkness, the cold, clammy darkness of death.

I could not remember how I had come here, or what hideous error had brought about my premature interment. All I knew was that I lived—but unless I managed to escape, I would soon be in a condition horribly appropriate to my surroundings.

Then began that which I dare not remember in detail. The splintering of wood, the burrowing struggle through loosely-packed grave earth; the gasping hysteria accompanying my clawing, suffocated progress to the sane surface of the world above.

It is enough that I finally emerged. I can only thank poverty for my deliverance—the poverty which had placed me in a flimsy, unsealed coffin and a pauper's shallow grave.

Clotted with sticky clay, drenched with cold perspiration, racked by utter revulsion, I crawled forth from betwixt the gaping jaws of death.

Dusk crept between the tombstones, and somewhere to my left the moon leered down to watch the shadowy legions that conquered in the name of Night.

The moon saw me, and a wind whispered furtively to brooding trees, and the trees bent low to mumble a message to all those sleeping below their shade.

I grew restless beneath the moon's glaring eye, and I wanted to leave this spot before the trees had told my secret to the nameless, numberless dead.

Despite my desire, several minutes passed before I summoned strength to stand erect, without trembling.

Then I breathed deeply of fog and faint putridity; breathed, and turned away along the path.

It was at that moment the figure appeared.

It glided like a shadow from the deeper shadows haunting the trees, and as the moonlight fell upon a human face I felt my heart surge in exultation.

I raced towards the waiting figure, words choking in my throat as they fought for prior utterance.

"You'll help me, won't you?" I babbled. "You can see . . . they buried me down there . . . I was trapped . . . alive in the grave . . . out now . . . you'll understand . . . I can't remember how it began, but . . . you'll help me?"

A head moved in silent assent.

I halted, regaining composure, striving for coherency.

"This is awkward," I said, more quietly. "I've really no right to ask you for assistance. I don't even know who you are."

The voice from the shadows was only a whisper, but each word thundered in my brain.

"I am a vampire," said the stranger.

Madness. I turned to flee, but the voice pursued me.

"Yes, I am a vampire," he said. "And . . . *so are you!*"

II

I MUST have fainted, then. I must have fainted, and he must have carried me out of the cemetery, for when I opened my eyes once more I lay on a sofa in his house.

The panelled walls loomed high, and shadows crawled across the ceiling beyond the candlelight. I sat up, blinked, and stared at the stranger who bent over me.

I could see him now, and I wondered. He was of medium height, gray-haired, clean-shaven, and clad discreetly in a dark business suit. At first glance he appeared normal enough.

As his face glided towards me, I stared closer, trying to pierce the veil of his seeming sanity, striving to see the madness beneath the prosaic exterior of dress and flesh.

I stared and saw that which was worse than any madness.

At close glance his countenance was cruelly illumined by the light. I saw the waxen pallor of his skin, and what was worse than that, the peculiar corrugation. For his entire face and throat was covered by a web of tiny wrinkles, and when he smiled it was with a mummy's grin.

Yes, his face was white and wrinkled; white, wrinkled, and long dead. Only his lips and eyes were alive, and they were red . . . *too* red. A face as white as corpse-flesh, holding lips and eyes as red as blood.

He smelled *musty.*

All these impressions came to me before he spoke. His voice was like the rustle of the wind through a mortuary wreath.

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"You are awake? It is well."

"Where am I? And who are you?" I asked the questions but dreaded an answer. The answer came.

"You are in my house. You will be safe here, I think. As for me, I am your guardian."

"Guardian?"

He smiled. I saw his teeth. Such teeth I had never seen, save in the maw of a carnivorous beast. And yet—wasn't *that* the answer?

"You are bewildered, my friend. Understandably so. And that is why you need a guardian. Until you learn the ways of your new life, I shall protect you." He nodded. "Yes, Graham Keene, I shall protect you."

"Graham Keene."

It was my name. I knew it *now*. But how did *he* know it?

"In the name of mercy," I groaned, "tell me what has happened to me!"

He patted my shoulder. Even through the cloth I could feel the icy weight of his pallid fingers. They crawled across my neck like worms, like wriggling white worms—

"You must be calm," he told me. "This is a great shock, I know. Your confusion is understandable. If you will just relax a bit and listen, I think I can explain everything."

I listened.

"To begin with, you must accept certain obvious facts. The first being—that you are a vampire."

"But—"

He pursed his lips, his *too* red lips, and nodded.

"There is no doubt about it, unfortunately. Can you tell me how you happened to be emerging from a grave?"

"No. I don't remember. I must have suffered a cataleptic seizure. The shock gave me partial amnesia. But it will come back to me. I'm all right, I must be."

The words rang hollowly even as they gushed from my throat.

"Perhaps. But I think not." He sighed and pointed.

"I can prove your condition to you easily enough. Would you be so good as to tell me what you see behind you, Graham Keene?"

"Behind me?"

"Yes, on the wall."

I stared.

"I don't see anything."

"Exactly."

"But—"

"Where is your shadow?"

I LOOKED again. There was no shadow, no silhouette. For a moment my sanity wavered. Then I stared at him. "You have no shadow either," I exclaimed, triumphantly. "What does that prove?"

"That I am a vampire," he said, easily. "And so are you."

"Nonsense. It's just a trick of the light," I scoffed.

"Still skeptical? Then explain this optical illusion." A bony hand proffered a shining object.

I took it, held it. It was a simple pocket mirror.

"Look."

I looked.

The mirror dropped from my fingers and splintered on the floor.

"There's no reflection!" I murmured.

"Vampires have no reflections." His voice was soft. He might have been reasoning with a child.

"If you still doubt," he persisted, "I advise you to feel your pulse. Try to detect a heartbeat."

Have you ever listened for the faint voice of hope to sound within you . . . knowing that it alone can save you? Have you ever listened and heard nothing? Nothing but the silence of *death?*

I knew it then, past all doubt. I was of the Undead . . . the Undead who cast no shadows, whose images do not reflect in mirrors, whose hearts are forever stilled, but whose bodies live on—live, and walk abroad, and take nourishment.

Nourishment!

I thought of my companion's red lips and his pointed teeth. I thought of the light blazing in his eyes. A light of hunger. Hunger for what?

How soon must I share that hunger?

He must have sensed the question, for he began to speak once more.

"You are satisfied that I speak the truth, I see. That is well. You must accept your condition and then prepare to make the

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necessary adjustments. For there is much you have to learn in order to face the centuries to come.

"To begin with, I will tell you that many of the common superstitions about—people like us—are false."

He might have been discussing the weather, for all the emotion his face betrayed. But I could not restrain a shudder of revulsion at his words.

"They say we cannot abide garlic. That is a lie. They say we cannot cross running water. Another lie. They say that we must lie by day in the earth of our own graves. That's picturesque nonsense.

"These things, and these alone, are true. Remember them, for they are important to your future. We must sleep by day and rise only at sunset. At dawn an overpowering lethargy bedrugs our senses, and we fall into a coma until dusk. We need not sleep in coffins—that is sheer melodrama, I assure you!—but it is best to sleep in darkness, and away from any chance of discovery by men.

"I do not know why this is so, any more than I can account for other phenomena relative to the disease. For vampirism is a disease, you know."

HE SMILED when he said it. I didn't smile. I groaned.

"Yes, it is a disease. Contagious, of course, and transmissible in the classic manner, through a bite. Like rabies. What reanimates the body after death no one can say. And why it is necessary to take certain forms of nourishment to sustain existence, I do not know. The daylight coma is a more easily classified medical phenomenon. Perhaps an allergy to the direct actinic rays of the sun.

"I am interested in these matters, and I have studied them.

"In the centuries to come I shall endeavor to do some intensive research on the problem. It will prove valuable in perpetuating my existence, and yours."

The voice was harsher now. The slim fingers clawed the air in excitement.

"Think of that, for a moment, Graham Keene," he whispered. "Forget your morbid superstitious dread of this condition and look at the reality.

"Picture yourself as you were before you awoke at sunset. Suppose you had remained there, inside that coffin, nevermore to awaken! Dead—dead for all eternity!"

He shook his head. "You can thank your condition for an escape. It gives you a new life, not just for a few paltry years, but for centuries. Perhaps—forever!

"Yes, think and give thanks! You need never die, now. Weapons cannot harm you, nor disease, nor the workings of age. You are immortal—and I shall show you how to live like a god!"

He sobered. "But that can wait. First we must attend to our needs. I want you to listen carefully now. Put aside your silly prejudices and hear me out. I will tell you that which needs be told regarding our nourishment.

"It isn't easy, you know.

"There aren't any schools you can attend to learn what to do. There are no correspondence courses or books of helpful information. You must learn everything through your own efforts. Everything.

"Even so simple and vital a matter as biting the neck—using the incisors properly—is entirely a matter of personal judgment.

"Take that little detail, just as an example. You must choose the classic trinity to begin with—the time, the place, and the girl.

"When you are ready, you must pretend that you are about to kiss her. Both hands go under her ears. That is important, to hold her neck steady, and at the proper angle.

"You must keep smiling all the while, without allowing a betrayal of intent to creep into your features or your eyes. Then you bend your head. You kiss her throat. If she relaxes, you turn your mouth to the base of her neck, open it swiftly and place the incisors in position.

"Simultaneously—it *must* be simultaneously—you bring your left hand up to cover her mouth. The right hand must find, seize, and pinion her hands behind her back. No need to hold her throat now. The teeth are doing that. Then, and only then, will instinct come to your aid. It must come then, because once you begin, all else is swept away in the red, swirling blur of fulfillment."

I cannot describe his intonation as he

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spoke, or the unconscious pantomime which accompanied the incredible instructions. But it is simple to name the look that came into his eyes.

Hunger.

"Come, Graham Keene," he whispered. "We must go now."

"Go? Where?"

"To dine," he told me. "To dine!"

III

HE LED me from the house, and down a garden pathway through a hedge.

The moon was high, and as we walked along a windswept bluff, flying figures spun a moving web across the moon's bright face.

My companion shrugged.

"Bats," he said. And smiled.

"They say that—we—have the power of changing shape. That we become bats, or wolves. Alas, it's only another superstition. Would that it were true? For then our life would be easy. As it is, the search for sustenance in mortal form is hard. But you will soon understand."

I drew back. His hand rested on my shoulder in cold command.

"Where are you taking me?" I asked.

"To food."

Irresolution left me. I emerged from nightmare, shook myself into sanity.

"No—I won't!" I murmured. "I can't—"

"You must," he told me. "Do you want to go back to the grave?"

"I'd rather," I whispered. "Yes, I'd rather die."

His teeth gleamed in the moonlight.

"That's the pity of it," he said. "You can't die. You'll weaken without sustenance, yes. And you will appear to be dead. Then, whoever finds you will put you in the grave.

"But you'll be alive down there. How would you like to lie there undying in the darkness . . . writhing as you decay . . . suffering the torments of red hunger as you suffer the pangs of dissolution?

"How long do you think that goes on? How long before the brain itself is rotted away? How long must one endure the charnal consciousness of the devouring worm? Does the very dust still billow in agony?"

His voice held horror.

"That is the fate you escaped. But it is still the fate that awaits you unless you dine with me.

"Besides, it isn't something to avoid, believe me. And I am sure, my friend, that you already feel the pangs of—appetite."

I could not, dared not answer.

For it was true. Even as he spoke, I felt hunger. A hunger greater than any I had ever known. Call it a craving, call it a desire—call it lust. I felt it, gnawing deep within me. Repugnance was nibbled away by the terrible teeth of growing need.

"Follow me," he said, and I followed. Followed along the bluff and down a lonely country road.

We halted abruptly on the highway. A blazing neon sign winked incongruously ahead.

I read the absurd legend.

"DANNY'S DRIVE-IN."

Even as I watched, the sign blinked out.

"Right," whispered my guardian. "It's closing time. They will be leaving now."

"Who?"

"Mr. Danny and his waitress. She serves customers in their cars. They always leave together, I know. They are locking up for the night now. Come along and do as you are told."

I followed him down the road. His feet crunched gravel as he stalked towards the now darkened drive-in stand. My stride quickened in excitement. I moved forward as though pushed by a gigantic hand. The hand of hunger—

He reached the side door of the shack. His fingers rasped the screen.

An irritable voice sounded.

"What do you want? We're closing."

"Can't you serve any more customers?"

"Nah. Too late. Go away."

"But we're very hungry."

I almost grinned. Yes, we were *very* hungry.

"Beat it!" Danny was in no mood for hospitality.

"Can't we get anything?"

Danny was silent for a moment. He was evidently debating the point. Then he called to someone inside the stand.

"Marie! Couple customers outside. Think we can fix 'em up in a hurry?"

"Oh, I guess so." The girl's voice was

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soft, complaisant. Would she be soft and complaisant, too?

"Open up. You guys mind eating outside?"

"Not at all."

"Open the door, Marie."

Marie's high heels clattered across the wooden floor. She opened the screen door, blinked out into the darkness.

My companion stepped inside the doorway. Abruptly, he pushed the girl forward.

"Now!" he rasped.

I lunged at her in darkness. I didn't remember his instructions about smiling at her, or placing my hands beneath her ears. All I knew was that her throat was white, and smooth, except where a tiny vein throbbed in her neck.

I wanted to touch her neck there with my fingers—with my mouth—with my teeth.

So I dragged her into the darkness, and my hands were over her mouth, and I could hear her heels scraping through the gravel as I pulled her along. From inside the shack I heard a single long moan, and then nothing.

Nothing . . . except the rushing white blur of her neck, as my face swooped towards the throbbing vein. . . .

IV

IT WAS cold in the cellar—cold, and dark. I stirred uneasily on my couch and my eyes blinked open on blackness. I strained to see, raising myself to a sitting position as the chill slowly faded from my bones.

I felt sluggish, heavy with reptilian contentment. I yawned, trying to grasp a thread of memory from the red haze cloaking my thoughts.

Where was I? How had I come here? What had I been doing?

I yawned. One hand went to my mouth. My lips were caked with a dry, flaking substance.

I felt it—and then remembrance flooded me.

Last night, at the drive-in, I had feasted. And then—

"No!" I gasped.

"You have slept? Good."

My host stood before me. I arose hastily and confronted him.

"Tell me it isn't true," I pleaded. "Tell me I was dreaming."

"You were," he answered. "When I came out of the shack you lay under the trees, unconscious. I carried you home before dawn and placed you here to rest. You have been dreaming from sunrise to sunset, Graham Keene."

"But last night—?"

"Was real."

"You mean I took that girl and—?"

"Exactly." He nodded. "But come, we must go upstairs and talk. There are certain questions I must ask."

We climbed the stairs slowly and emerged on ground level. Now I could observe my surrounding with a more objective eye. This house was large, and old. Although completely furnished, it looked somehow untenanted. It was as though nobody had lived here for a long time.

Then I remembered who my host was, and what he was. I smiled grimly. It was true. Nobody was *living* in this house now.

Dust lay thickly everywhere, and the spiders had spun patterns of decay in the corners. Shades were drawn against the darkness, but still it crept in through the cracked walls. For darkness and decay belonged here.

We entered the study where I had awakened last night, and as I was seated, my guardian cocked his head towards me in an attitude of inquiry.

"Let us speak frankly," he began. "I want you to answer an important question."

"Yes?"

"What did you do with her?"

"Her?"

"That girl—last night. What did you do with her body?"

I put my hands to my temples. "It was all a blur. I can't seem to remember."

His head darted towards me, eyes blazing. "I'll tell you what you did with her," he rasped. "You threw her body down the well. I saw it floating there."

"Yes," I groaned. "I remember now."

"You fool—why did you do that?"

"I wanted to hide it. . . . I thought they'd never know—"

"You *thought!*" Scorn weighted his voice. "You didn't think for an instant. Don't you see, now she will never rise?"

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"Rise?"

"Yes, as you rose. Rise to become one of us."

"But I don't understand."

"That is painfully evident." He paced the floor, then wheeled towards me.

"I see that I shall have to explain certain things to you. Perhaps you are not to blame, because you don't realize the situation. Come with me."

He beckoned. I followed. We walked down the hall, entered a large, shelf-lined room. It was obviously a library. He lit a lamp, halted.

"Take a look around," he invited. "See what you make of it, my friend."

I SCANNED the titles on the shelves—titles stamped in gold on thick, handsome bindings; titles worn to illegibility on ancient, raddled leather. The latest in scientific and medical treatises stood on these shelves, flanked by age-encrusted incunabula.

Modern volumes dealt with psycopathology. The ancient lore was frankly concerned with black magic.

"Here is the collection," he whispered. "Here is gathered together all that is known, all that has ever been written about—us."

"A library on vampirism?"

"Yes. It took me decades to assemble it completely."

"But why?"

"Because knowledge is power. And it is power I seek."

Suddenly a resurgent sanity impelled me. I shook off the nightmare enveloping me and sought an objective viewpoint. A question crept into my mind, and I did not try to hold it back.

"Just who are you, anyway?" I demanded. "What is your name?"

My host smiled.

"I have no name," he answered.

"No name?"

"Unfortunate, is it not? When I was buried, there were no loving friends, apparently, to erect a tombstone. And when I arose from the grave, I had no mentor to guide me back to a memory of the past. Those were barbaric times in the East Prussia of 1777."

"You died in 1777?" I muttered.

"To the best of my knowledge," he retorted, bowing slightly in mock deprecation. "And so it is that my real name is unknown. Apparently I perished far from my native heath, for diligent research on my part has failed to uncover my paternity, or any contemporaries who recognized me at the time of my—er—resurrection.

"And so it is that I have no name; or rather, I have many pseudonyms. During the past sixteen decades I have traveled far, and have been all things to all men. I shall not endeavor to recite my history.

"It is enough to say that slowly, gradually, I have grown wise in the ways of the world. And I have evolved a plan. To this end I have amassed wealth, and brought together a library as a basis for my operations.

"Those operations I propose will interest you. And they will explain my anger when I think of you throwing the girl's body into the well."

He sat down. I followed suit. I felt anticipation crawling along my spine. He was about to reveal something — something I wanted to hear, yet dreaded. The revelation came, slyly, slowly.

"Have you ever wondered," he began, "why there are not more vampires in the world?"

"What do you mean?"

"Consider. It is said, and it is true, that every victim of a vampire becomes a vampire in turn. The new vampire finds other victims. Isn't it reasonable to suppose, therefore, that in a short time—through sheer mathematical progression—the virus of vampirism would run epidemic throughout the world? In other words, have you ever wondered why the world is not filled with vampires by this time?"

"Well, yes—I never thought of it that way. What is the reason?" I asked.

He glared and raised a white finger. It stabbed forward at my chest—a rapier of accusation.

"Because of fools like you. Fools who cast their victims into wells; fools whose victims are buried in sealed coffins, who hide the bodies or dismember them so no one would suspect their work.

"As a result, few new recruits join the ranks. And the old ones—myself included—are constantly subject to the ravages of

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the centuries. We eventually disintegrate, you know. To my knowledge, there are only a few hundred vampires today. And yet, if new victims all were given the opportunity to rise—we would have a vampire army within a year. Within three years there would be millions of vampires! Within ten years we could rule earth!

"Can't you see that? If there was no cremation, no careless disposal of bodies, no bungling, we could end our hunted existence as creatures of the night—brothers of the bat! No longer would we be a legendary, cowering minority, living each a law unto himself!

"All that is needed is a plan. And I—I have evolved that plan!"

His voice rose. So did the hairs upon my neck. I was beginning to comprehend, now—

"Suppose we started with the humble instruments of destiny," he suggested. "Those forlorn, unnoticed, ignorant little old men—night watchmen of graveyards and cemeteries."

A SMILE creased his corpse-like countenance. "Suppose we eliminated them? Took over their jobs? Put vampires in their places—men who would go to the fresh graves and dig up the bodies of each victim they had bitten while those bodies were still warm and pulsing and undecayed?

"We could save the lives of most of the recruits we make. Reasonable, is it not?"

To me it was madness, but I nodded.

"Suppose that we made victims of those attendants? Then carried them off, nursed them back to reanimation, and allowed them to resume their posts as our allies? They work only at night—no one would know.

"Just a little suggestion, but so obvious! And it would mean so much!"

His smile broadened.

"All that it takes is organization on our part. I know many of my brethren. It is my desire soon to call them together and present this plan. Never before have we worked cooperatively, but when I show them the possibilities, they cannot fail to respond.

"Can you imagine it? An earth which we could control and terrorize — a world in which human beings become our property, our cattle?

"It is so simple, really. Sweep aside your foolish concepts of *Dracula* and the other superstitious confectionery that masquerades in the public mind as an authentic picture. I admit that we are—unearthly. But there is no reason for us to be stupid, impractical figures of fantasy. There is more for us than crawling around in black cloaks and recoiling at the sight of crucifixes!

"After all, we are a life-form, a race of our own. Biology has not yet recognized us, but we exist. Our morphology and metabolism has not been evaluated or charted; our actions and reactions never studied. But we exist. And we are superior to ordinary mortals. Let us assert this superiority! Plain human cunning, coupled with our super-normal powers, can create for us a mastery over all living things. For we are greater than Life—we are Life-in-Death!"

I half-rose. He waved me back, breathlessly.

"Suppose we band together and make plans? Suppose we go about, first of all, selecting our victims on the basis of value to our ranks? Instead of regarding them as sources of easy nourishment, let's think in terms of an army seeking recruits. Let us select keen brains, youthfully strong bodies. Let us prey upon the best earth has to offer. Then we shall wax strong and no man shall stay our hand—or teeth!"

He crouched like a black spider, spinning his web of words to enmesh my sanity. His eyes glittered. It was absurd somehow to see this creature of superstitious terror calmly creating a super-dictatorship of the dead.

And yet, I was one of them. It was real. The nameless one would do it, too.

"Have you ever stopped to wonder why I tell you this? Have you ever stopped to wonder why you are my confidant in this venture?" he purred.

I shook my head.

"It is because you are young. I am old. For years I have labored only to this end. Now that my plans are perfected, I need assistance. Youth, a modern viewpoint. I know of you, Graham Keene. I watched you before . . . you became one of us. You were selected for this purpose."

"Selected?" Suddenly it hit home. I fought down a stranglehold gasp as I asked

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the question. "Then you know who—did this to me? *You know who bit me?"*

Rotting fangs gaped in a smile. He nodded slowly.

"Of course," he whispered. "Why—*I* did!"

V

HE WAS probably prepared for anything except the calmness with which I accepted this revelation.

Certainly he was pleased. And the rest of that night, and all the next night, were spent in going over the plans, in detail. I learned that he had not yet communicated with—others—in regard to his ideas.

A meeting would be arranged soon. Then we would begin the campaign. As he said, the times were ripe. War, a world in unrest—we would be able to move unchallenged and find unusual opportunities.

I agreed. I was even able to add certain suggestions as to detail. He was pleased with my cooperation.

Then, on the third night, came hunger.

He offered to serve as my guide, but I brushed him aside.

"Let me try my own wings," I smiled. "After all, I must learn sooner or later. And I promise you, I shall be very careful. This time I will see to it that the body remains intact. Then I shall discover the place of burial and we can perform an experiment. I will select a likely recruit, we shall go forth to open the grave, and thus will we test our plan in miniature."

He fairly beamed at that. And I went forth that night, alone.

I returned only as dawn welled out of the eastern sky—returned to slumber through the day.

That night we spoke, and I confided my success to his eager ears.

"Sidney J. Garrat is the name," I said. "A college professor, about 45. I found him wandering along a path near the campus. The trees form a dark, deserted avenue. He offered no resistance. I left him there. I don't think they'll bother with an autopsy—for the marks on his throat are invisible and he is known to have a weak heart.

"He lived alone without relatives. He had no money. That means a wooden coffin and quick burial at Everest tomorrow. Tomorrow night we can go there."

My companion nodded.

"You have done well," he said.

We spent the remainder of the night in perfecting our plans. We would go to Everest, locate the night watchman and put him out of the way, then seek the new grave of Professor Garrat.

And so it was that we re-entered the cemetery on the following evening.

Once again a midnight moon glared from the Cyclopean socket of the sky. Once more the wind whispered to us on our way, and the trees bowed in black obeisance along the path.

We crept up to the shanty of the graveyard watchman and peered through the window at his stooping figure.

"I'll knock," I suggested. "Then when he comes to the door—"

My companion shook his gray head. "No teeth," he whispered. "The man is old, useless to us. I shall resort to more mundane weapons."

I shrugged. Then I knocked. The old man opened the door, blinked out at me with rheumy eyes.

"What is it?" he wheezed, querulously. "Ain't nobuddy suppose' tuh be in uh cemetery this time uh night—"

Lean fingers closed around his windpipe. My companion dragged him forth towards nearby shrubbery. His free arm rose and fell, and a silver arc stabbed down. He had used a knife.

Then we made haste along the path, before the scent of blood could divert us from our mission—and far head, on the hillside dedicated to the last slumbers of Poverty, I saw the raw, gaping edges of a new-made grave.

He ran back to the hut, then, and procured the spades we had neglected in our haste. The moon was our lantern and the grisly work began amidst a whistling wind.

No one saw us, no one heard us, for only empty eyes and shattered ears lay far beneath the earth.

We toiled, and then we stooped and tugged. The grave was deep, very deep. At the bottom the coffin lay, and we dragged forth the pine box.

"Terrible job," confided my companion.

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"Not a professionally dug grave at all, in my opinion. Wasn't filled in right. And this coffin is pine, but very thick. He'd never claw his own way out. Couldn't break through the boards. And the earth was packed too tightly. Why would they waste so much time on a pauper's grave?"

"Doesn't matter," I whispered. "Let's open it up. If he's revived, we must hurry."

We'd brought a hammer from the caretaker's shanty, too, and he went down into the pit itself to pry the nails free. I heard the board covering move, and peered down over the edge of the grave.

He bent forward, stooping to peer into the coffin, his face a mask of livid death in the moonlight. I heard him hiss.

"Why—the coffin is empty!" he gasped. "Not for long!"

I drew the wrench from my pocket, raised it, brought it down with every ounce of strength I possessed until it shattered through his skull.

AND then I leaped down into the pit and pressed the writhing, mewing shape down into the coffin, slammed the lid on, and drove the heavy nails into place. I could hear his whimperings rise to muffled screams, but the screams grew faint as I began to heap the clods of earth upon the coffin-lid.

I worked and panted there until no sound came from the coffin below. I packed the earth down hard—harder than I had last night when I dug the grave in the first place.

And then, at last, the task was over.

He lay there, the nameless one, the deathless one; lay six feet underground in a stout wooden coffin.

He could not claw his way free, I knew. And even if he did, I'd pressed him into his wooden prison face down. He'd claw his way to hell, not to earth.

But he was past escape. Let him lie there, as he had described it to me—not dead, not alive. Let him be conscious as he decayed, and as the wood decayed and the worms crawled in to feast. Let him suffer until the maggots at last reached his corrupt brain and ate away his evil consciousness.

I could have driven a stake through his heart. But his ghastly desire deserved defeat in this harsher fate.

Thus it was ended, and I could return now before discovery and the coming of dawn—return to his great house which was the only home I knew on the face of the earth.

Return I did, and for the past hours I have been writing this that all might know the truth.

I am not skilled with words, and what I read here smacks of mawkish melodrama. For the world is superstitious and yet cynical—and this account will be deemed the ravings of a fool or madman; worse still, as a practical joke.

So I must implore you; if you seek to test the truth of what I've set down, go to Everest tomorrow and search out the newly-dug grave on the hillside. Talk to the police when they find the dead watchman, make them go to the well near Danny's roadside stand.

Then, if you must, dig up the grave and find that which must still writhe and crawl within. When you see it, you'll believe—and in justice, you will not relieve the torment of that monstrous being by driving a stake through his heart.

For that stake represents release and peace.

I wish you'd come here, after that—and bring a stake for me. . . .

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Dark Mummery

By THORP McCLUSKY

UNTIL the early spring of 1939 I had never entered a reputedly "haunted" house, nor had I ever met anyone who had done so.

It all came about in rather a rambling sort of way, starting off with twelve or fifteen of us driving down to Phipps' Cove on a Saturday afternoon to spend the weekend with the Bradley Merrills. How long ago that seems now!

I looked forward to a truly delightful weekend; I already knew, or at least was acquainted with, several of the guests—Bob Mansfield, who paints for art's sake but designs fanciful and expensive apartments for the very wealthy for a living; Rebikoff, who

Beware of a "reputedly" haunted house. The reputation may be well earned

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has a marionette show; Gladys Sugden, the caustic, hoydenish novelist; and three or four others. Merrill, by the way, was and still is an illustrator.

The afternoon was very casual and delightful; we played a sort of haphazard tennis on the lawn, swam—those of us with Polar Bear instincts—in the freezing surf, and just talked and wandered about. Dinner was at seven, in a high-ceilinged, creamy-white room with a huge black marble fireplace at one end in which a driftwood fire snapped, showering multicolored sparks against the heavy screen. The meal was leisurely; it was already dark outside as we finally assembled in the big, gracious living room for brandies and highballs.

As usual, Bradley and Elsa had prepared no set routine for the evening; Vladimir Lessoff started things off by wandering over to the Chickering and treating us to an impromptu concert. Then Clevedore put on some of his magic, and following Clevedore we danced.

The evening passed swiftly; it was with incredulous surprise that I saw Bradley glance at the tall walnut clock in the hall and dramatically raise his hand.

"In ten seconds, my pious friends and I hope not-too-drunken companions, it will be exactly midnight, Eastern Standard Time."

He had hardly finished speaking when the old clock whirred and rasped, and bonged out twelve slow strokes. We all listened gravely, and immediately the brazen clangor had ceased Gladys Sugden made the inevitable suggestion.

"Ghost story! Who'll tell a ghost story?"

Drily, Bob Mansfield applied the sophisticated squelch. "Why, Gladys! You of all people! We don't have to do anything as tame as that. Not when there's a haunted house right here at the Cove!"

I had heard of that house. A few miles distant along the shore road, it had stood empty for a half century or more. It was popularly supposed to have been built by Jeremiah Phipps, one of New England's more successful privateersmen, or, too frequently, pirates.

Gladys, with just a trifle too much eagerness—so it seemed to me—fell in with the idea. "Perfect! What could be better for Saturday night high jinks? I've always had a sneaking longing to go inside that house. Let's snoop over there tonight. There's a lovely moon. . . !"

Well, we took a vote. The "Ayes" won, of course, overwhelmingly.

I think I suspected trickery from the very start. As a matter of fact, I learned afterward that I was right, and who the ringleaders were—Bradley, Bob Mansfield, and a meek-looking little cartoonist named Gregory. Gladys was in it, too.

My certainty that we were in for some ghostly amateur theatricals was clinched when I noticed, as we were getting ready to leave the house, that Mansfield and Gregory had unobtrusively disappeared. I suspected that they were to be the ghosts of the evening.

WE PILED into three or four cars and drove the six or seven miles to the Phipps mansion. In the moonlight it looked even more ancient, more forbidding than in daylight, with its gaunt exterior chimneys and its deeply-recessed, many-paned windows. As we swarmed toward its black pile I looked in the shadows cast by the house, by the trees, for Mansfield's car, but there were a hundred pools of inky shadow where a car could be hidden.

Bradley did not have to unlock or force the door; it was unlocked and opened easily. That seemed significant to me. I was surer than ever that some one had gone ahead and was already hidden inside.

When we were all in the hallway, Bradley closed the door behind us with a creaking of ponderous hinges, a rusty click of the wrought iron latch, and turned on a flashlight. He led the way, with an assurance that led me to believe he had been there before, into a large room at the front of the house. I glimpsed briefly a long staircase leading up into the darkness at the end of the hallway; I sensed rather than saw the ornate mouldings surmounting cold, vaultlike spaces, a shrouding of heavy fine dust over everything. But I noticed too that Bradley had been careful to keep the beam of his flashlight turned upward until we were all inside that huge parlor, and I felt sure he had done that to keep us from noticing the fresh footprints of Mansfield and Gregory in the dust underfoot.

Except for the light from the flashlight, the parlor was almost totally dark. Heavy wooden shutters over the windows per-

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mitted no moonlight to enter, except through two or three narrow cracks in the warped panels. The light was too faint to reveal more than the presence and position of the people in the room; certainly it was not strong enough to permit us to identify each other.

"Well, Brad, we're here," Gladys Sugden chirped perkily. "Bring on your ghosts. Or shall we go looking for them? Who's afraid of the big bad ghosts, anyway?"

Bradley parried that one. "This is supposed to be a haunted house, isn't it, Gladys? Can't a ghost appear in this room as well as upstairs or in the cellar? I for one am for staying here and waiting for whatever happens. I don't want any rotten floors collapsing under me. This place isn't any Palace of Mirth."

I suspected he was afraid that we might stumble onto his ghosts before they had a chance to get into their phosphorous paint.

He won his point; he turned off the flashlight—to make it seem more realistic, he said—and we waited.

I don't know just what I expected to happen. I admit the uncertainty of waiting made me feel creepy, and it must have affected the others who did not suspect any funny business much more powerfully. There was unreality in the whole adventure, there was unreality in the shadowy vagueness of our figures, there was unreality in the cold stillness of the long-shuttered room. I caught myself wondering how a bunch of supposedly intelligent adults could act so downright foolish.

Then I began to notice the light. At first, it was just the faintest, vaguest glow, hardly more than a lessening of the total blackness beyond the open hallway door. I seemed to feel the outlines of the hallway growing into visibility without actually seeing them as yet, limned in a sort of purplish absence of complete darkness. That strange light was so vague that it might almost have been imagined.

But the sudden creeping shriveling down my spine was real enough! The others felt it too; I could sense that they were shrinking away from the doorway.

THE faint light grew stronger, and tension gripped me with the certainty that something was creeping silently down that staircase into the hall, invisible to me as yet from where I stood.

I acknowledged unwillingly, then, that Bradley was putting on his show with utter artistry. No hollow groans or clanking chains, none of those too-theatrical effects that defeat their own purpose. It was the very absence of effect that left our imaginations unhampered and built up an eerie apprehension in us. I wondered how Bradley would produce his ghosts without spoiling the effect. Perhaps he didn't intend to actually produce them at all, perhaps he intended to get his effect in some other, less obvious way.

I don't know how long we stood there in that empty room—it may have been several minutes, while no person spoke or changed position, while we strained our eyes trying to see in the light that was hardly less than blackness—the light, I told myself with admiration of my own cleverness, that must be made by the slow uncovering of a stained glass window, letting the moonlight in. Once or twice I heard someone's breathing sharply indrawn, then released in a half-gasp.

Then I saw the figures, standing in the unearthly, purplish gloom.

Again a queer flash of unwilling approbation swept me. Those figures were not skeletoned in phosphorous paint, or anything as crude as that; they were merely vague blotches in human shape, standing silently in the almost non-existent visibility in the hallway.

I have wondered, since, just how few of us did not, at that moment, really believe that they were ghosts!

Gradually, then, in much the same manner as indirect lighting is controlled, the purplish glow began to brighten. With the increase in illumination, I began to feel sure that I recognized those two motionless figures.

The one on the right, tall, slightly stooped, was certainly Mansfield. The dark blotch hiding the lower part of his face was a false beard, those baggy trousers, that hinting of a cutlass at the waist, were all parts of the pirate costume Bradley had considered most appropriate for the occasion. The other fellow, standing to the left and slightly behind Mansfield was Gregory, all right. He'd put a great daub of paint on his breast to

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simulate blood; he kept his hands folded over it.

The figures neither moved nor spoke. The light was too dim for me to distinguish details of their features, and as it became slightly stronger something of a nervous shock swept over me as I sensed, rather than saw, that their lips were moving, as though they were trying to speak, that their hands were outthrust toward us, as though warning us back. It was an effect, undeniably; Bradley was putting his show over well, after all!

Splitting the silence, a woman screamed, a high-pitched, keening note. In an instant the hypnotic tension that had gripped us all was broken. Bradley cursed and flipped on the flashlight; with a quick rushing of anxious footsteps Gladys Sugden was at the side of the girl, who was sobbing violently. Bradley's voice boomed out reassuringly, "That's all, that's enough. It's just been a joke, folks. For God's sake, make her understand that it's just a joke, Gladys! A joke that wasn't in very good taste. I'm sorry."

He swung the light on the two figures standing in the doorway.

"All right, Bob, Gregory. Fun's fun, a joke's a joke, enough's enough. Come on in. Break it up."

But the two figures did not move. They still stood there, holding their hands outstretched toward us, their lips moving.

Then Bradley swore, viciously, horribly, without mirth. "You pigheaded fools! Can't you see that you're scaring one of the girls half to death? Get in here and take off that junk!"

STILL the figures stood there motionless, tableauesque. I think that we were all beginning to be afraid that they had entered so fully into the spirit of the deception that they were temporarily crazed; even Bradley had no knowledge of what they might do next; what further macabre jest they might have planned was as unknown to him as to us. Curiously, though I was watching them with single-minded attention, I noticed other things too; I noticed with a sort of detached interest that there really was, as I had suspected, a stained glass window high above the staircase, a window which dispelled that unearthly glow over the hallway, now stronger, now weaker as the moon was bright or obscured by clouds.

Almost stealthily, Bradley kept edging forward. He was within six feet of Mansfield, his torch shining blindingly in Mansfield's face. I was only a pace or two behind, and I could see Mansfield's face clearly. There was an uncanny fixity in his gaze that gave me, despite myself, a feeling of discomfort that was very close to horror. The thought came to me abruptly, "Is this damned place really haunted, after all? Have these fellows seen something that drove them out of their minds?"

Bradley cursed again, sharply. The unexpected, brutal sound jarred against my eardrums with the force of an explosion. With the curse Bradley leaped forward. His right hand, furiously outstretched, clutched at Mansfield.

Mansfield and Bradley glided, yes, *glided*, back, swiftly, yet effortlessly. The sudden, relatively violent motion of all three reminded me bizarrely of the quick shifting of scenes thrown on a screen by an old-fashioned magic lantern. Then the tableau was resumed, but now Bradley was standing in the center of the hallway, holding his right hand out before him, looking at it with a strange intentness. Mansfield and Gregory had halted at the foot of the staircase, their hands still outthrust, thrusting us back.

Bradley spoke like a drunken person.

"Bob? Bob?"

His shoulders hunched, he shuffled doggedly, unsteadily forward, and as he approached Mansfield and Gregory turned and leaped up the staircase, the light from the flashlight shining full on them, on the staircase and the wall above and behind them.

Then that thing happened which is beyond normal human experience. Instantaneously, suddenly as a bolt of lightning, two strangers were also there at the top of the staircase, two sun-swarthed, lithe-muscled men, men with flashing teeth beneath heavy mustaches, with the glint of gold in their ears and the glitter of cutlasses in their hands.

It was like a silent motion picture, running at top speed. There was no sound, only an utter violence of motion. There should have been the thudding of bare feet on the staircase, but I heard no such sound; there should have been the heavy panting of those men and the harsh burst of their curses, but I heard only silence.

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Mansfield and Gregory plunged upward to the head of the staircase. Mansfield was slightly in the lead; his right arm swung up in a chopping blow that seemed to go through one of the men as through a mirage; his body, tensed to meet resistance that was not there, spun crazily around and plunged over the low balustrade; I listened for the crash of his fall and heard no sound. I saw Gregory catapult against the other stranger, hurtle through that man in the instant a cutlass flashed, and disappear beyond my range of vision on the staircase landing.

Abruptly, no one was there, no one at all. The head of the staircase gaped down at us, blank, barren, deserted!

I heard Gladys Sugden screaming. She was trying to call Mansfield's name, but the sounds that came from her lips were unrecognizable. My body was trembling violently, and spasms of hot and cold swept over me. I think that horror gripped us all then like a mighty fist, squeezed us until we were incapable of thought, until we could only stand there and feel it engulfing us in beating waves. . . .

I knew then that those two strangers were the ghosts—the true ghosts of old Jeremiah Phipps' mansion!

What, in the Name of the Almighty, had we just seen re-enacted? The experience through which Mansfield and Gregory had passed early in the evening—an experience so mind-shattering that it had driven them mad?

Where were they?

"Bradley!" My voice was a whispered rattle. "Where are they? Mansfield and Gregory? Where are they?"

Bradley looked at me, his eyes enormous, his lips trembling.

"Where are they?" he repeated slowly. He moved his hands in an odd, uncontrolled way, helplessly.

While he stared at me, I took the flashlight from him. Somehow, I started up the staircase, and Bradley followed.

At the top, on the landing where, like uplifted arms, narrower flights continued upward into the gloom, we halted.

There, beneath the stained glass window, huddled far back against the wall and hidden from view from below by the pitch of the staircase, lay the twisted body of a man, fallen as if death had come as he had catapulted across the landing from the staircase below.

Bradley moaned, and I felt the balustrade shudder as he sagged heavily against it. I was trembling, uncontrollably.

The body was the body of Gregory!

SOMEHOW we found the courage, after a moment, to look down. With photographic clarity our eyes saw, and our numbed minds recorded automatically, the staring horror in Gregory's wide-open, glazing eyes, the smear of crimson paint over his heart.

Without speaking, we turned away and staggered down that staircase. As though urged by a Fate beyond human capacity to resist, I turned the flashlight beam into the dark recess behind the staircase, beneath the balustrade across which Mansfield had seemed to plunge.

Without surprise I saw that Mansfield's body was there, spreadeagled as though he had put out his arms to break the fall, crushed against the naked floor, his neck broken.

I remember little of what else happened that night. I do not know if among us there were hysterical outbursts or a more terrible, controlled silence. I do not remember how or when we left that house. Memory grows clearer with the next day, with the beginnings of the grinding police investigation, the certainty with which the police believed that we had trumped up a fantastic story to cover a double murder in our "fast set," the newspaper headlines.

It was a long time before that night in the old Phipps house was forgotten by the public. But it was forgotten at last, and for years it remained as no more than an area of nightmare in the recesses of my memory, until last summer, when the old house was finally torn down, to save taxes, somebody told me.

About that time I chanced to meet Bradley in town one day. He looked more distinguished than ever, with his prematurely white hair, and he looked at my graying temples with wry understanding.

"They're either too young or too old." He softly sang a phrase from the hit song and made a quick, angry gesture with his right hand. "We're too told, and that's that. How about lunch?"

In the quiet, around the corner off the Avenue restaurant to which he took me, he

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told me those things which drew all the threads together, wrote "Finis" to the story of Phipps' mansion.

"I couldn't stay away—after they started to raze that house," he said slowly, quietly. "I went down there almost every day; I knew that they would find something—call it premonition, intuition, what you will. . . .

"I knew that they would find something, some explanation, in that staircase. I watched them take up the flooring on that landing, rip up the rubble, the stone and mortar, beneath. . . .

"That house was built to endure. Old Phipps, when he built it, was ready to settle down, all right.

"But first he had to get rid of his past. He must have had a couple of his men who wanted to stay on shore with him, even though he'd split his bloody plunder with them, with his crew. But old Phipps knew that those two fellows we saw at the top of that staircase weren't the kind he wanted around him in his respectability.

"This must have been what happened. When the masons had just about finished filling in that staircase, old Phipps just bashed in the heads of those two sailors of his and dumped the bodies in the mortar and covered them up. They found the skeletons just the other day, you know."

I picked up my coffee, put it down again.

"I read in the paper about the gold earrings and the cutlasses they dug up with those skeletons," I said.

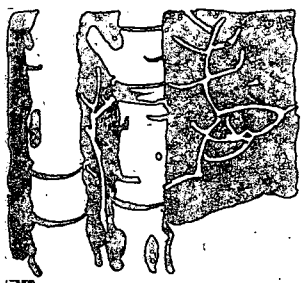
Bradley looked at me thoughtfully. "Funny about those cutlasses. Remember that Gregory's body was unmarked, and that he died of heart failure?"

I picked up my cup again; once again I put it down.

"Gregory — Mansfield," I whispered. "What a horrible way to die! Think of it; they went up that staircase the second time, after they had already seen the ghosts! That was a re-enactment, wasn't it, Bradley? We could have saved them then; they were crazy with fear, but not crazy enough not to try to yarn us. We should have knocked them down, tied them up—anything—only we should have saved them, somehow."

Slowly Bradley shook his head. A curious, faraway look—the look of one who gazed into the depths of the infinite—came into his eyes.

"No, my friend. We couldn't have saved them. It was too late for that. For they were already dead when we saw them in that —yes, it *was* a re-enactment. They were dead before we entered the house. We saw, not two, but *four* ghosts that night. When I tried to grasp Mansfield, there in that hallway, my hand went through him as though through a nothingness—a nothingness that was cold and empty and terrible as the black dead space beyond the farthest stars!"



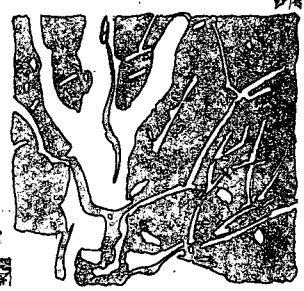
REVOLT OF THE TREES

By Allison V. Harding

A Story of Fantastic Horror You'll Long Remember

In the January WEIRD TALES

Out November First



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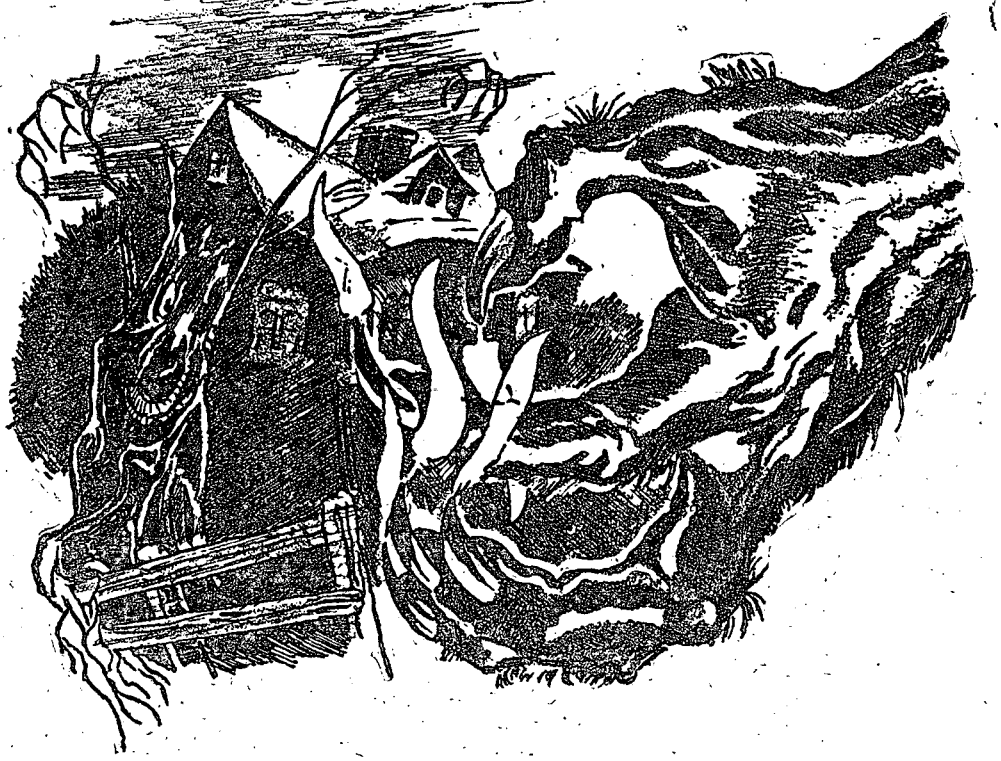
The Dead Man's Hand



By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Now open lock To the Dead Man's knock!
Fly bar and bolt and band!
Nor move nor swerve Joint, muscle or nerve
To the spell of the Dead Man's Hand!
Sleep, all who sleep!—Wake, all who wake!
But be as the Dead for the Dead Man's sake!
—*Thomas Ingoldsby, "The Hand of Glory."*

THE men in front of the store were all laughing in the sunset, but not one of them sounded cheerful.

"Y'hear this, Sam?" someone asked a latecomer. "Stranger askin' the way to Old Monroe's. Must be the one who bought the place."

More laughter, in which the latecomer joined. Berna's father turned grim and dangerous enough to counterbalance all their mockery. He was hard and gaunt in his seersucker suit, with a long nose, a long chin, and a foxtrap mouth between them.

"I know the joke," he said, leaning over his steering wheel. "You think the place is haunted."

"No," cackled a dried little gaffer on an upturned nail-keg. "Haunted ain't the word.

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

The Shonokins took this country from creatures too terrible to imagine—they themselves are none less evil

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Curst, more like it. Me, I ain't got many more nights to live, and I wouldn't spend none of 'em at Old Monroe's."

"I know all about that silly story," announced Berna's father.

"All?" teased someone else. "Silly story?"

"And I'm thankful it's so well believed. That's how I was able to buy the farm so cheap."

"I wonder," mumbled the little old man, "if you bought it from who owns it rightful. 'Fter all, way I heard it, Old Mónroe's deal was only for his lifetime—long enough in all conscience." He spat at a crack in the boardwalk. "When it comes to that, whoever bargained for Old Monroe's soul made a fool trade, for Old Monroe's soul was a sure shot anyway to go to—"

"If you're all through laughing," interrupted Berna's father savagely, "maybe someone will remember enough manners to direct us."

"Please, gentlemen," added Berna timidly from beside her father. She was slender where he was gaunt, appealing where he was grim. Her dark wide eyes sought a loiterer, who removed his palmleaf hat.

"If you're set on it," said this one, "you follow the street out, along the pavement. Miss the turn into Hanksville, then go left on a sand road. Watch for a little stone bridge over a run, with a big bunch of willows. Across the run, beyond them willows, is a private road. All grown up, and not even rabbit hunters go there. Well, at the other end is your new house, and I wish you luck." He fiddled with the hat. "You'll need it."

"Thank you kindly," said Berna's father. "My name's Ward Conley. I'll be your neighbor at the Old Monroe farm. And if you think you'll play any ghost jokes around there at night, remember I'm moving in with a shotgun, which I can use tolerably well."

He started the car. Berna heard the men start talking again, not laughing now.

"I didn't think," she ventured as they drove out of the little town in the last red sunglow, "that the story we heard was taken so seriously." She looked at her father. "I didn't even pay attention when the farm broker mentioned it. Tell me all of it."

"Nervous, Berna?" demanded Ward Conley.

"No. Just curious."

"It's the sort of yarn that's pinned on some house in every district where history's old enough, and ghost-believing gawks are plentiful enough. What I heard was that the farmer owner, the one they called Old Monroe, came here eighty years ago and took a piece of land that seemed worthless. By working and planning he made it pay richly. He never got married, never mixed with his neighbors, never spent much of what he took in, and he lived to be more than a hundred. Knowing so little about him, the corn-crackers hereabouts made up their own story. That Old Monroe made a sort of bargain with—well—"

"With the devil?"

"Maybe. Or anyway some old Indian spirit of evil. They said the bargain included a magic-built house, the richest of crops, and more money than anyone for miles around. Old Monroe got the last named, anyway. When he died, he died raving. Most hermits and misers are crazy. Since then nobody goes near the place. A second cousin up in Richmond inherited, and sold to us for a song."

"A bargain with devils," mused Berna. "It sounds like Hawthorne."

"It sounds like foolishness," snapped Conley. "Any devils come bargaining around, I'm enough of a business man to give them the short end of the deal."

IN A CITY to the north, big John Thunstone listened earnestly as he leaned across a desk.

"You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Thunstone," said the professor opposite, "that you're really serious about the Shonokin myths?"

"I discount nothing until I know enough to judge," replied Thunstone. "The hint I picked up today is shadowy. And you're the only man who has made an intelligent study of the subject."

"Only the better to finish my American folkways encyclopedia," deprecated the other. "Well the Shonokins are supposed to be a race of magicians that peopled America before the Red Indians migrated from—wherever they migrated from. One or two commentators insist that Shonokin wizardry and enmity is the basis for most of the Indian stories of supernatural evils,

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everything from the Wendigo to those nasty little tales about singing snakes and the Pukwitchee dwarfs. All mention we get of Shonokins today—and it's mighty slim—we get third or fourth hand. From old Indians to recent ones, through them by way of first settlers to musty students like me. There's an amusing suggestion that Shonokins, or their descendants, actually exist today here and there. Notably in the neighborhood of—"

"I wonder," broke in John Thunstone, rather mannerlessly for him, "if that isn't the neighborhood I'm so curious about."

IN THE dusk the Conley car passed the Hanksville turn, gained the sand road and crossed the stone bridge. Beyond the willows showed a dense-grown hedge of thorny trees, with a gap closed by a single hewn timber on forked stakes. The timber bore a signboard, and by the glow of the headlights Berna could read the word "PRIVATE." Conley got out, unshipped the barrier, then returned to drive them along a brush-lined road with ruts full of rank, squelchy grass.

A first journey over a strange trail always seems longer than it is. Berna felt that ages had passed before her father stepped on the brake. "There's our home," he said.

At almost the same moment the moon rose, pale and sheeny as a disk of clean, fresh bone.

The pale light showed them a house, built squarely like old plantation manors, but smaller. It had once been painted gray, and still looked well kept and clean. No windows were broken, the pillars of the porch were still sturdy. Around it clung dark, plump masses of shrubbery and, farther back, tall flourishing trees. A flagged path led up to the broad steps. Berna knew she should be pleased. But she was not.

From the rear seat Conley dug their suitcases and rolls of bedding. Berna rummaged for the hamper that held their supper.

She followed her father up the flagstone way, wondering why the night seemed so cool for this season. Conley set down his burdens, then mounted the porch to try the door.

"Locked," he grumbled. "The broker said there was never a key." He turned and studied a window. "We'll have to break the glass."

"May I help?" inquired a gentle voice, and into view, perhaps from the massed bushes at the porch-side, strolled a man.

He did not stand in the full moonlight, and later Berna would wonder how she knew he was handsome. Slim white-clad elegance, face of a healthy pallor under a wide hat, clear-cut features, deep eyes and brows both heavy and graceful—these impressions she received. Conley came down off the porch.

"I'm Ward Conley, the new owner of this farm," he introduced himself briskly. "This is my daughter, Berna."

The stranger bowed. "I am a Shonokin."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Shannon."

"Shonokin," corrected the man.

"People in town said that nobody dared come here," went on Conley.

"They lied. They usually lie." The man's deep eyes studied Berna, they may have admired. She did not know whether to feel confused or resentful. "Mr. Conley," continued the gentle voice, "you are having difficulty?"

"Yes. The door's jammed or locked."

"Let me help." The graceful figure stepped up on the porch, bending over something. A light glared. He seemed to be holding a little sheaf of home-dipped tapers, such as Berna had seen in very old-fashioned farmhouses. They looked knobby and skimpy, but their light was almost blinding. He held it close to the lock as he stooped. He did not seem to move, but after a moment he turned.

"Now your door is open," he told them. And so it was, swinging gently inward.

"Thanks, Mr. Shonokin," said Conley, more warmly than he had spoken all evening. "Won't you step inside with us?"

"Not now." Bowing again, the man swept his fingertips over the lights he held, snuffing them out. Descending the steps lithely, he walked along the stone flags. At the far end he paused and lifted his hat. Berna saw his hair, long, wavy and black as soot. He was gone.

"Seems like a nice fellow," grunted Conley. "How about some candles of our own, Berna?"

She gave him one from the hamper, and he lighted it and led her inside.

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"I know that it's a considerable journey, and that the evidence is slim," John Thunstone was telephoning at Pennsylvania Station. "But I'll get the full story, on the exact spot. I'm sorry you and Dr. Trowbridge can't come. I'll report when I get back." He listened a moment, then chuckled in his trim mustache. "Haven't I always returned. Now, goodbye, or I'll miss my train."

WARD CONLEY lifted his wax candle overhead and grunted approvingly. "I was a little worried, Berna, about buying the place sight unseen, even at a figure that would make the worst land profitable." His eyes gleamed. "But this is worth coming home to, hah?"

The old furniture looked comfortable and in good shape. Berna wondered if the rich carpet in the hall was not valuable. In the room beyond was a table of dark wood, with sturdy chairs around it, and farther on glass-doored closets with china and silver and the white of folded linen. Conley dragged down a hanging lamp.

"Oil in it, and the wick ready trimmed," he announced. With his candle he lighted the lamp and drew it up to the ceiling. "Berna, someone's put this place in apple-pie order for us. Even swept and dusted. Might it have been Mr. Shonokin's family? Neighborly, I call it." His stern face was relaxing. They walked into a kitchen, well appointed but cool. There was firewood in the box. Berna set down her hamper. Then they mounted to the upper floor.

"The beds are made," Conley exulted. "This front room will be yours, Berna. I'll take the next one. Suppose we eat now, and poke around more tomorrow. I want to be up early, out at the barn and in the fields."

Returning to the kitchen, they brought out sandwiches and fruit and a jugful of coffee. "It's getting cold," pronounced Conley, peering into the jug. "Let's fire up the range and heat it."

Berna believed that the coffee was hot enough, but she was glad that her father had made an excuse for a fire. The kitchen was downright shuddery. Even while the kindling blazed up, she got a sweater from her suitcase and put it on. They ate in silence, for Conley disliked conversation while he was at the important business of eating. When Berna had brushed up the crumbs, he yawned.

"Bed now," he decreed, and again took up the candle. Walking through the front room, he drew down the lamp and blew it out. Berna kept close to his heels as they monuted the stairs. The little moving flame that Conley held up made a host of strange and stealthy shadows around them.

ALONE in the room assigned her, Berna drew back the bedclothes. They were so chilly within as to seem damp, but she had brought up a blanket roll from the car. She made the bed afresh, and before creeping in she knelt down. Her prayer was the one taught her as a child, while her mother still lived:

"Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed I lie upon.
There are four corners to my bed,
There are four saints around my head—
One to watch and one to pray,
And two to bear my soul away."

She remembered her flutter of dread at the last two lines. Though serious and thoughtful, Berna was young. She did not want her soul to be borne away yet. And she felt a close silence about her, as of many lurking watchers.

Of a sudden, there popped into her mind a tag of another bedtime prayer, heard in the long ago from a plantation mammy. She repeated that, too:

"Keep me from hoodoo and witch,
And lead my path from the poorhouse gate. . . ."

The tenseness seemed to evaporate around her. Berna got into bed, listened a while to the sighing of a breeze-shaken tree outside her window, and finally slept soundly until her father's fist on the door told her that it was dawn and time to be up.

They had fried eggs and bacon in the kitchen that remained cool despite the fire that had smouldered in the range all night.

Wiping his mouth at the end of the meal, Ward Conley tramped to the back

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door and tugged at the knob. It refused to budge, though he heaved and puffed.

"I wish that Shonokin man was back here to open this, too," he said at last. "Well, let's use the front door."

Out they went together. The early morning was bright and dry, and Berna saw flowers on the shrubs, blue, red and yellow, that were beyond her knowledge of garden botany. They walked around the side of the house and saw a quiet barnyard, with a great red barn and smaller sheds. Beyond these extended rich-seeming fields.

"Something's been planted there," said Conley, shading his eyes with his hand. "If anybody thinks he can use my fields—well, he'll lose the crop he put in. Berna, go back to the house and make a list of the things we need. I'll drive into town later, either Hanksville or that little superstition-ridden rookery we passed through yesterday."

He strolled off, hands in pockets, toward the land beyond the barnyard. Berna again walked around the house and in through the front door. For the first time she was alone in her new home, and fancied that her footsteps echoed loudly, even on the rug in the hall. Back in the kitchen she washed the dishes—there was a sink, with running water from somewhere or other—then sat at the kitchen table to list needed articles as her father had directed.

There was a slight sound at the door, as if a bird had fluttered against it. Berna glanced up, wide-eyed.

That was all. She sat where she was, pencil in fingers, eyes starting and unwinking. She did not move. There was no feeling of stiffness or confinement or weight. Trying, in the back of her amazed and terrified mind, to diagnose, she decided it was like the familiar grammar-school experiment—you clasp your hands and say "I cannot, I cannot," until you find yourself unable to move your fingers from each other. Berna may have breathed, her heart may have beaten, She could not be sure, then or later.

THE door, that had not budged for her father's struggles, was gently swaying open. In stepped Mr. Shonokin, smiling over the glow of his peculiar little sheaf of tapers. He sniffed them, slid the sheaf into his pocket. And Berna could move again.

Only her eyes moved at first, quartering him over. He wore the white suit, beautifully cut, and of a fabric Berna could not identify—if it were fabric and not some sort of skin, delicately thin and soft and perfectly bleached. His hands, which hung gracefully at his sides, were long and a little strange; perhaps the ring fingers were unnaturally long, longer than the middle fingers. One of them held his wide hat, and the uncovered locks of dead black hair fell in soft waves over Mr. Shonokin's broad brow. As Berna's eyes came to his, he smiled.

"I've been talking to your father," he said, "and now I want to talk to you."

She got to her feet, grateful for the restored power to do so. "Talk?" she echoed. "Talk of what?"

"This place of yours," he told her, laying his hat on the table. "You see, the title isn't exactly clear."

She shook her head at once. She knew her father better than that.

"It's completely clear, Mr. Shonokin. All in order, back to the original grant from the Indians."

"Ah," said Shonokin, still gently. "But where did the Indians get their title? Where? I'll tell you. From us, the Shonokins."

Berna was still trembling, from that strange moment of tranced inaction. She had been hypnotized, she told herself, like Trilby in the book. It must not happen again. She would face this stranger with resolution and defiance.

"You don't mean to claim," she replied, with an attempt at loftiness, "that your family was in this part of the country before the Indians."

"We were everywhere before the Indians," he assured her, and smiled. His teeth were white, perfect, and ever so slightly pointed, even the front teeth that should be square-edged like chisels.

"Then you're Indian yourself," she suggested, but he shook his head.

"Shonokins are not Indians. They are not—" He paused, as if choosing his words. "We are not like any race you know. We are old, even when we are young. We took this country from creatures too terrible for you to imagine, even though they are dead and leave only their fossil bones. We ruled

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well, in ways you can't understand." That sounded both sad and superior. "For reasons that you can't understand, either, we were once tired of ruling. That is when we allowed the Indians to come, retaining only limited domains. This is one of them."

"This farm?" prompted Berna. She still held the pencil, so tightly that her fingers were bruising against it.

"This farm," said her visitor. "The Indians never had any right to it. It is ground sacred to the Shonokins, where their wisdom and rule will continue forever. And so any deed dating back to Indians is not lawful. I told your father that, and it's the truth, however stupid and furious he may be."

"Suppose," said Berna, "that you say to my father that you think he's stupid. Tell him to his face. I'd like to see what he does to you then."

"I did tell him," replied the man they knew as Mr. Shonokin. "And he did nothing. He was frozen into silence, as you were just now, when I held up—" His strange-shaped hand moved toward his side pocket, where he had put that strange sheaf of tapers.

"Suppose," went on Berna, "that you get out of this house and off this property."

It was bold, fierce talk for a quiet girl like Berna, but she felt she was managing it splendidly. She took a step toward him. "Yes, right now."

His pointed teeth smiled at her again. He backed smoothly toward the open door and paused on the sill. "You're hasty," he protested gently. "We want only to be fair. You may enjoy this place—enjoy it very much, as Old Monroe did—if you simply and courteously make the same agreement."

"Sell our souls?" Berna snapped, as she had never snapped at anyone before in all her life.

"The Shonokins," he said, "do not recognize the existence of any such thing as a soul."

He was gone, as abruptly as he had gone from the end of the path last night.

BERNA sat down, her heart stuttering inside her. After a minute, her father came in. He, too, sat down. Berna wondered if she were as pale as he.

"That—that—that trick-playing, sneering skunk," he panted. "No man can try things like that on Ward Conley." He looked around. "Did he come in here? Is he still here? If he is, I'm going to get the shotgun."

"He's gone," Berna replied. "I made him go. But who is he? Did he tell you that preposterous story?"

As she spoke, she knew she had believed it all, about the Shonokins who had ruled before the Indians, who wanted to rule again, and who claimed this land, on which nobody could live except as their tenant and vassal.

"He put some sort of a trance or spell on me," said Conley, still breathing hard. "If he hadn't been able to do it, I'd have killed him—there's a hayfork out there in the barn. And he wanted me to believe I'd do some hokus-pokus for him, to be allowed to live here on my own land. Berna," said Conley suddenly, "I think he'll be sneaking back here again. And I'm going to be ready for him."

"Let me go to town when you go," she began, but Conley waved the words aside.

"You'll drive in alone and shop for whatever we need. Because I stay right here, waiting for Mr. Smart Aleck Shonokin." Rising, he walked into the front room, where much of the luggage was still stacked. He returned with his shotgun, fitting it together. It was a well-kept repeater. Ponderously he pumped a shell into the barrel.

"We'll see," promised Conley balefully, "how much lead he can carry away with him."

And so Berna drove the car to the village. At the general store in front of which loiterers had mocked the evening before, she bought flour, potatoes, meat, lard, tinned goods. Her father had stipulated nails and a few household tools, and on inspiration Berna bought two heavy new locks. When she returned, Conley approved this last purchase and installed the locks, one at the front door and one at the back.

"The windows can all be latched, too," he reported. "Let him jimmy his way inside now. I'll give a lot to have him try it." When he had finished his work, Conley picked up the shotgun again, cradling it across his knees. "Now we're all ready for a call from Mr. Shonokin."

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But he was tense, nervous, jumpy. Berna cut herself peeling vegetables for supper, and dreaded the dropping of the sun toward the western horizon.

AT HANKSVILLE, several townsfolk had ambled out to see the afternoon train arrive. They stared amiably at the one disembarking passenger, a broad giant of a man with a small mustache, who addressed them in a voice that sounded purposeful and authoritative.

"Old- Monroe's," they echoed his first question. "Lookee, mister, nobody ever goes there."

"Well, I'm going there at once. A matter of life and death. Will anybody let me rent his automobile?"

Nobody answered that at all.

"How do you get there?" he demanded next, and someone told about the crossing, the sanded road, the stone bridge, the clump of willows, the side trail.

"And how far?"

Ten miles, opined one. A companion thought it might be nearer twelve.

John Thunstone looked up at the sinking sun. "Then I have no time to waste," he said, "for I'll have to walk it."

He strode off through Hanksville. Those who had spoken with him now watched him go. Then they turned to each other, shook their heads, and made clicking sounds with their tongues.

IT WAS not easy for Conley to explain to Berna all that had passed between him and Shonokin. In the first place, Conley had been both furious and alarmed, and was still so. In the second, there was much he could not understand.

It seemed that the visitor had bobbed up at Conley's elbow, with that talent he had for appearing and disappearing so quickly. He had courteously admired the growing fields of corn and beans, and when Conley had repeated his complaint that someone was making free with the ground, had assured Conley that these things had been planted and were growing for the Conleys alone. He, Shonokin, took credit for the putting in and advancement of what looked like a prize crop.

"And then," Conley told Berna, "he took up the question of payment. I said, of course, that I'd be glad to give him something for his trouble. Whatever was fair, I said. And he out with an idea you'd never believe—not even though I swear to every word he said."

Shonokin wanted the Conleys to live comfortably, pleasantly, even richly. He was willing to give assurance that there would never be anything to limit or endanger their material prosperity. But, here and now, Conley must admit by signed paper his indebtedness and dependency.

"Dependency!" Conley fairly exploded, describing the scene to his daughter. "Dependency—on that young buck I never even saw before last night! I just stood there, wondering which word to say first, and he went on with the idea that he and his bunch —whoever the Shonokins might be—would make themselves responsible for the crops and the profits of this place, deciding what would be raised and see that it succeeded. Then I blew up."

He paused, and his face went a shade whiter. He looked old.

"I told you what came after that. I grabbed for the hayfork. But he held up his hand, that hand he carries that gives off light."

"The little candles?" prompted Berna.

"It's a hand, I tell you, a sort of skinny hand. It has lights on the fingers. I froze like a wooden Indian in front of a cigar store. And he grinned that ugly way he has, and told me that I now had time to think it over quietly; that I'd better be a good tenant, and that he and we could be a wonderful help to each other if we didn't lose any energy by quarreling. I couldn't move until he walked away out of sight."

Conley shuddered. "What," he demanded savagely, "is he driving at? Why does he want to run our affairs?"

That question, reflected Berna to herself, had been asked countless times in the world's history by people who could not understand tyranny. Tyrants alone could understand, for they lived tormented by the urge and appetite and insistence to dominate others.

"He won't come back," she said, trying to be confident and not succeeding.

"Yes, he will," replied Conley balefully, "and I'll be ready for him." He patted the shotgun in his lap. "Is supper about done?"

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It was, but they had little appetite. Afterwards Berna washed the dishes. She thought she had never felt such cold water as gushed from the faucet. Conley went into the front room, and when Berna joined him he sat in a solid old rocking chair, still holding the shotgun.

"The furniture's nice," said Berna lamely.

"Reminds me of another thing that skunk said," rejoined Conley. "That his Shonokins had made all the furniture, as well as the house. That it—the furniture—was really theirs and would do what they said. What did he mean?"

Berna did not know, and did not reply.

"Those new locks weren't made by him," Conley went on. "They won't obey him. Let him try to get in."

When Conley repeated himself thus aimlessly, it meant that he was harassed and daunted. They sat in the gathering gloom, that the hanging lamp could not dispel successfully. Berna wished for a radio. There was one in the car, and this was a night for good programs. But she would not have ventured into the open to meet the entire galaxy of her radio favorites in person. Later on perhaps they'd buy a cabinet radio for this room, she mused; if they lasted out the evening, and the next day and the days and nights to follow, if they could successfully avoid or defeat the slender dark man who menaced them.

CONLEY had unpacked their few books. One lay on the sideboard near Berna's chair, a huge showy volume of Shakespeare's works that a book agent had sold to Berna's mother years ago. Berna loved Shakespeare no more and no less than most girls of limited education and experience. But she remembered the words of a neighbor, spoken when the book was bought; Shakespeare could be used, like the Bible, for "casting sortes." It was an old-country custom, still followed here and there in rural America. You opened the book at random and hastily clapped your finger on a passage, which answered whatever troubled you. Hadn't the wife of Enoch Arden done something like that, or did she remember her high school English course rightly?

She lifted the volume into her lap. It fell open of itself. Without looking at the fine double-columned type, she put out her forefinger quickly. She had opened to Macbeth. At the head of the page was printed: *"Act I, Scene 3."* She stooped to read in the lamplight:

"Were such things here as we do speak about,
Or have we eaten on the insane root,
That takes the reason prisoner?

That was close enough to what fretted her and her father. Shakespeare, what she knew of him, was full of creepy things about prophecies, witches, phantoms, and such. The "insane root"—what was that? It had a frightening sound to it. Anyway, Shonokin had momentarily imprisoned their minds with his dirty tricks of hypnotism. Again she swore to herself not to be caught another time. She had heard that a strong effort of will could resist such things. She took hold of the book to replace it on the sideboard.

She could not.

As before, her eyes could not blink, her muscles could not stir. She could only watch as, visible through the hallway beyond, the front door slowly moved open and showed the dead pale light that Shonokin could evoke.

He glided in, white-clad, elegantly slender, grinning. He held his light aloft, and Conley had been right. It was shaped like a hand. What had seemed to be a joined bunch of tapers were the five fingers, each sprouting a clear flame. Berna saw how shriveled and shrunken those fingers were, and how bones and tendons showed through the coarse skin of their backs. Shonokin set the thing carefully on a stand by the door to the hallway. It was flat at the wrist end, it stayed upright like the ugliest of little candlesticks.

Shonokin walked closer, gazing in hushed triumph from the paralyzed Conley to the paralyzed Berna.

"Now we can settle everything," he said in his gentle voice, and stuck a terrible little laugh on the end of the words. He paused just in front of Berna's fixed eyes. She could study that white suit now, could see the tiny pore-openings in the strange integument from which it was tailored. His slender hands, too, with their abnormally long ring fingers—they did not have human nails but talons, narrow and curved and trimmed

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most carefully to cruel points, as if for better rending.

"Mr. Conley is beyond any reasonable discussion," the creature was saying. "He is an aging man, harsh and boastful and narrow from his youth upwards. But Miss Berna—" His eyes slid around to her. Their pupils had a lean perpendicularity, like the pupils of a cat. "Miss Berna is young," he went on. "She is not reckless or greedy or violent. She will listen and obey, even if she does not fully understand, the wise advice of the Shonokins."

He rested his hands, fingers spread, on the heavy table. It seemed to stir at his touch, like a board on ripply water.

"She will obey the better," said their captor, "when she sees how simply we go about removing her father, with his foolish opposition. Conley," and the eyes shifted to the helpless man, "you were so mannerless today as to doubt many of the things I told you. Most of all you seemed to scorn the suggestion that this furniture can move at my bidding. But watch."

THE slender hand was barely touching the table-top. Shonokin drew together his spread fingertips, the sharp horny talons scraping softly on the wood. Again the table creaked; quivered, and moved.

Spiritualism, Berna insisted to herself. Mediums did that sort of illusion for customers at paid seances. Men like Dr. Dunninger and John Mulholland wrote articles in the newspapers, explaining the trickery. This Shonokin person must be a professional sleight-of-hand performer. He made as if to lift the hand. The table shifted again, actually rising with the gesture, as if it were of no weight and gummed to his fingers.

"You see that it does obey," the gentle voice pointed out. "It obeys, and now I give you the full measure of proof, Conley. This table is going to kill you."

Shonokin stepped toward Conley's rocking chair, and the table stepped with him.

"It is heavy, Conley, though I make it seem light. Its wood is dark and ancient, and almost as solid and hard as metal. This table can kill you, and nobody can sensibly call the death murder. How could your law convict or punish an insensible piece of furniture, however weighty?"

Again he stepped toward Conley. Again the table kept pace. It was like some squat, obedient farm beast, urged along by its master's touch on its flank.

"You will be crushed, Conley. Berna, do you hear all this? Make careful note of it, and tell it to yourself often; for when things are all over, you will realize that you cannot tell it to others. Nobody will believe the real nature of your father's death. It cannot appear otherwise than a freak accident—a heavy table tipped over upon him, crushing him. What narrow-brained sheriff or town marshal would listen if you told the truth?"

Even if she had been able to speak, Berna could not have denied his logic.

"And after your father is dead, you will be recognized as mistress here. You will have learned to obey my people and me, recognize our leadership and guidance. This farm is both remote and rich. It will form our gathering point for what we wish to do in the world again. But first—"

Once more his hand shifted. The table began slowly to rear its end that was closest to where Conley sat.

It was long and massive, and it creaked ominously, like an ancient drawbridge going up. The thick legs that rose in air seemed to move, like the forefeet of a rearing, pawing horse. Or was that a flicker of pale light from the candle-hand yonder?

"Nearer," said Shonokin, and the table pranced forward, its upper legs quivering. They would fall in a moment like two pile-drivers. "Nearer. Now—"

Something moved, large and broad but noiseless, in at the front door. An arm darted out, more like a snake than an arm. The candle-hand flew from where it had been placed, struck the floor, and a foot trod on it. All five of its flames went out at once.

Shonokin whirled, his hand leaving the table. It fell over sidewise, with a crash that shook the windows. One second later came a crash still louder.

Conley had risen from his chair, jammed the muzzle of the shotgun against Shonokin's ribs, and touched the trigger. The charge almost blew the slender man in two.

It took all of John Thunstone's straining thews to set the table right again. Then he sat on its edge, speaking to Conley and

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Berna, who sagged in their chairs too exhausted for anything but gratitude.

"The magic used was very familiar," Thunstone was saying. "The 'hand of glory' is known in Europe and in old Mexico, too." He glanced at the grisly trodden-out thing, still lying on the floor. "You'll find it described in Spence's Encyclopedia of Occultism, and a rhymed tale about it in Ingoldsby Legends. The hand of a dead murderer—and trust people like the Shonokins to be able to secure that—is treated with saltpeter and oils to make it inflammable. We needn't go into the words that are said over it to give it the power. Lighted by the proper sorcerer, it makes locks open, and all inside the house remain silent as death."

"You were able to move," reminded Conley.

"Because I came in after the hand had laid the spell. I wasn't involved, any more than your visitor himself," and Thunstone glanced at the silent, slender body covered by a blanket on the floor.

"Is the hand of glory also Shonokin magic?" asked Berna. "Did they perhaps learn it first, and teach it to those other peoples?"

"About the Shonokins I know very little more than you yourselves seem to have heard. It seems evident that they do exist, and that they plan to be active in the world, and that they do feel a claim on this land of yours, and so on. But the death of one of them may deter the others."

"How?" asked Conley.

"You and I will bury him, under the flagstones at the far end of your walk. His body will keep other Shonokins from your door. They are a magic-minded lot, and a dangerous one, but they fear very few things more than they fear their own dead."

"What will the law say?' quavered Berna.

"Nothing, if you do not speak, and how can you speak? From outside I heard this one say, very truthfully, that the real story would never be believed, even in this superstitious district. Let it go with what I suggest. Justice has certainly been done. I doubt if you will be bothered by more Shonokins, though they may be heard from elsewhere."

"But what are they?" cried Berna. "What?"

Thunstone shook his great head. "My studies are anything but complete. All I know is that they are an old people and clever, very sure of their superiority, and that the ways they hope to follow are not our ways. Mr. Conley, are you ready?"

Conley departed to fetch spade and pick. Alone with Thunstone and the body under the blanket, Berna spoke:

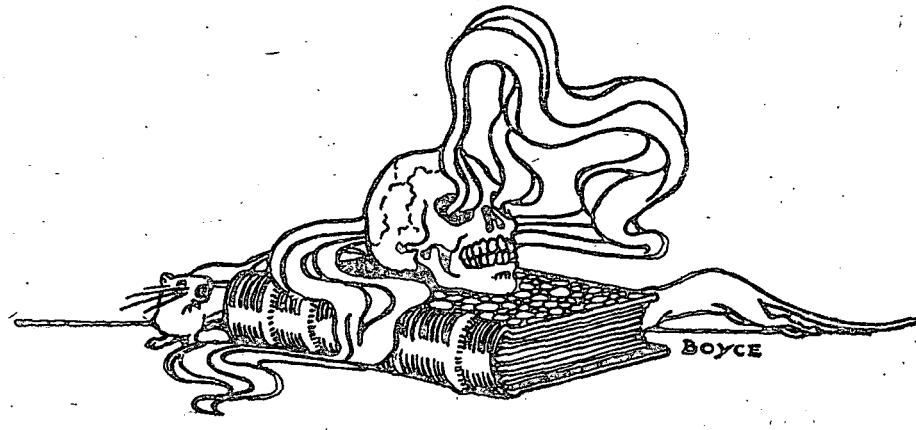
"I don't know how to say how thankful I am—"

"Then don't try," he smiled. Berna laid her little hand on his huge arm.

"I will pray for you always," she promised.

"Prayers are what I greatly need," replied Thunstone, very thankfully on his own part.

For he remembered how, at the moment of his leaving New York, he had heard that one Rowley Thorne had been discharged as cured from an insane asylum.



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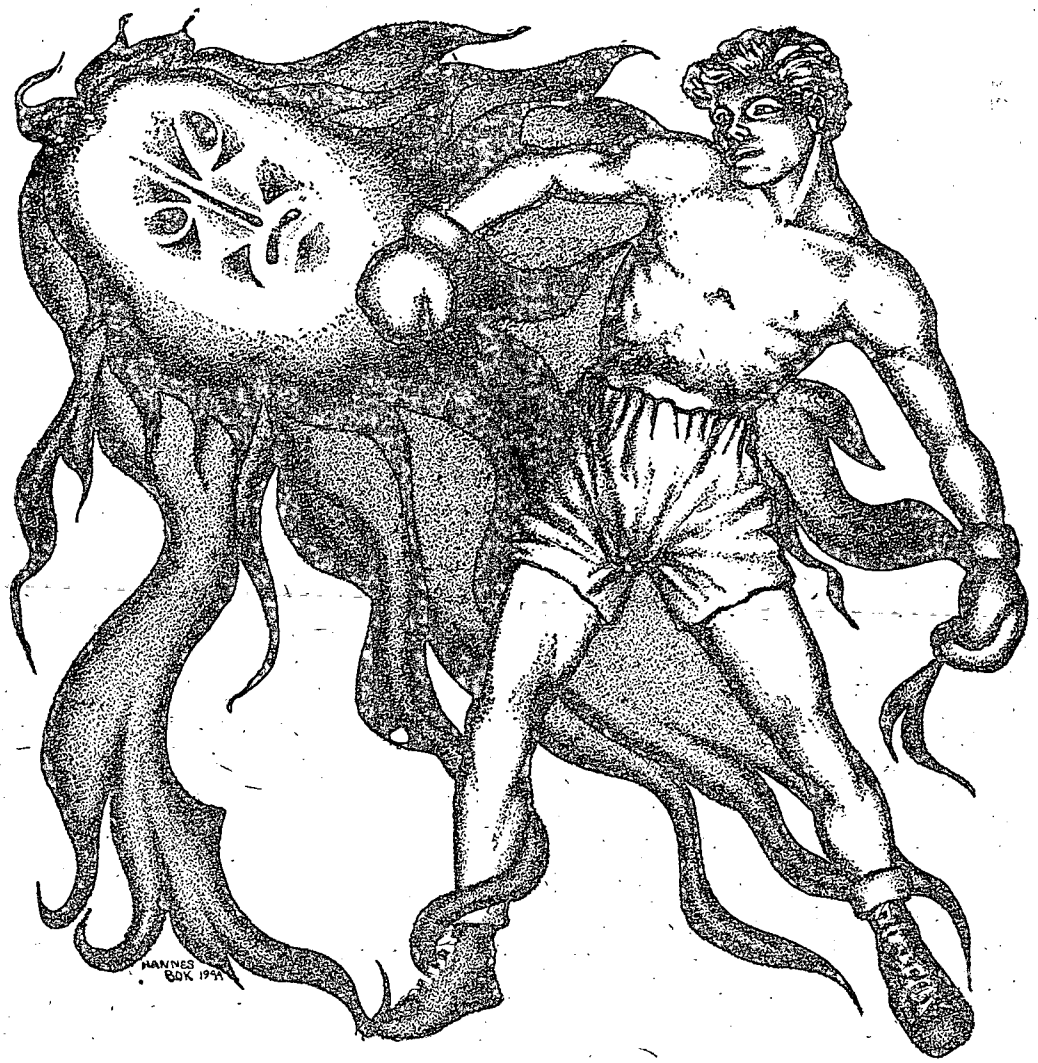

The Ghost Punch

By HANNES BOK

"IN THIS corner, we have Terry Flanagan, contender for the heavyweight title—"

The announcer was bellowing with two voices, his own and the gigantic, hollow echo resounding from the stadium's walls. Terry bobbed up, shook his gloves to the yelling mob, and thumped down on his stool again, hardly aware of what he was doing, because —for the first time in his life, Terry was scared. Scared? Fright had slapped him silly!

Heading by HANNES BOK

Every male Flanagan meets tragedy at the moment of his greatest triumph, the skull-faced hag reminded him

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"And in this corner, the Battling Redskin, Big Chief Running Water—"

Terry swiped a look at the Indian, who towered a good six-feet four as he hulked up to collect his shares of the applause, most of which racketed from what seemed to be a cheering section composed entirely of his tribal brothers, colorfully decked out in feathers and beaded buckskin. Up until a few minutes ago, Terry hadn't worried about the redskin in the slightest. The Indian held a twenty-two pound weight advantage over him, but Terry had always known that the right punch at the right time would flatten him into a card. Had always known, that is, until now.

But now Terry knew that the Indian was going to do the flattening. Well, Terry would do what he could.

He smiled vaguely as he heard the crowd yelling his name. They were as confident as he had been! What if they knew what he had learned? Would they be as confident then?

He groaned at the thought, and touched his forehead with a glove. Mike Mulcahey, his second, patted his broad shoulders. "Hey, Terry! What's eatin' you? This is no time to get woozy!"

As if Terry didn't know! But Terry only smiled again, and so feebly that Mike's mouth dropped open in dismay.

So much depended on this fight! Years and years of hard work, of sacrifice both on Terry's part and his mother's. And now, just as things were going good, just as Terry had bet every single cent he had in the world on himself, this thing had to happen!

It all made sense, though. Grandpop Dennis had fallen downstairs and broken his neck the night he was elected mayor. Pop had died from a too potent Mickey which somebody had slipped into his beer. And now Terry was going to lose this fight!

Oh, it wasn't a jinx. Jinxes could be licked. This was far worse, and there was no way out of it!

Yes. Grandpop and pop. Terry hadn't thought of their dying as a family curse. But that was what the old hag had said, the old hag who had appeared in the locker room.

Mike was taping his hands, when she appeared. Terry had been dreaming about what he was going to do with the fortune he'd make from his bet—how he'd set mom up for the rest of her life in the super-penthouse she deserved. And then—pfft!—there was this old harridan's skull-like face grinning evilly at him from the door of one of the lockers, just as if her face was a plaster mask hung up on a hook.

Terry gulped and blinked, but she wasn't a trick of his imagination—she was the McCoy, the real Irish McCoy, for she was as Irish as Terry himself. A few wisps of dirty white hair straggled over her seamed forehead, and her eyes sparkled.

Terry tried to point her out to Mike, who had looked up indignantly. "Hey, keep your hand still! How can I get this tape wound if you fling your hand around?" He added sympathetically, "Aw, you can't be nervous, kid! This is a cinch! You'll knock him for a flock of cuckoo birds!" He patted Terry's arm, and was about to resume his taping, when he was stricken by Terry's amazed expression, and he did a double-take. "What're you gooping at?" He turned. "What's so excitin'?"

Terry gulped again. "Don't you see her?" Tape trailed from his hand as he pointed.

"See who, kid? Say—have you taken to liquor, like your old man?—God rest him!"

"The old woman!"

MIKE almost sat on the floor. He threw his eyes to the ceiling, and indulged in conversation with his favorite saint. "You hear that? He sees an old woman! Holy saints!" He gripped Terry's squared face between his palms. "Look, kid, if you got to go berserk, do it out in the ring, not in here!"

"But I see her, plain as day!"

"Yipe!" Mike sprinted to a closet and returned to wave a bottle under Terry's nose. "Sniff this! You feel better?"

Terry took a good strong whiff. "Look, Mike, she's on the locker."

"Yes, and I'm the Queen of Sheba. Cut out the funny stuff, I got plenty of gray hairs already!"

The old hag decided to say something. Her voice was as tinny and unreal as music from an old Edison cylinder-phonograph. "Of course he can't see me! And he can't hear me, either. But you can, and you'd bet-

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ter listen good!" Her voice sharpened as Terry stirred. "I'm your family's curse, and I always make my appearance before a tragedy. You're not going to win the fight tonight."

"Huh?" Terry asked.

"I didn't say nothin'!" Mike growled, resuming his bandaging of Terry's hands. "Look, kid, if you feel dizzy, or something, you'd better make this straight! I got to know. You're good, all right, but so's the Big Chief. If you're not up to snuff, he'll cut you to ribbons!"

"I'm okay," Terry muttered unconvincingly.

"Yeah?" Mike doubted. "Then shut up with the funny business. Sometimes your sense of humor goes a little too far!"

The hag agreed pleasantly. "Yes, you might as well keep your mouth shut. Talking won't do you any good. Only you can see me or hear me. Well, Terence O'Conner Flanagan, take a good look around you. Enjoy yourself while you may! After the third round — well, you'll be seeing your father and your grandfather!"

"Now, wait—" Terry began.

"What's the matter, too loose?" Mike demanded.

"Okay," Terry said.

THE hag went on, "A hundred years ago, your great-grandfather fell in love with me, and then jilted me. I swore I'd carry my vengeance beyond the grave, and that's just what I'm doing! Every male Flanagan has died or will die at the moment of his greatest triumph! And this is your triumph, isn't it?" She tinged her voice with mock sympathy. "Your poor little mother will no longer need to struggle, all your debts will be paid, and you'll be champion—you think! Ha!" She launched some rather grade-B laughter.

"Like fun you'll be champion! For I'm going to be in the ring with you! I'll deflect every blow that you aim—and in the third round, the Battling Redskin will break your neck with a hook to the chin. And if you're thinking that this is just a bad dream, don't fool yourself? It's not, as you'll find out."

And with that she snuffed out like the flame of a windblown candle.

Terry smiled sickishly, and Mike growled, "What's griping you? You look like a guy just trying out his first set of store teeth. Cheer up, kid! You can't break down, now! You got to do it—for your ma, and for me!"

"Yeah, I know." Terry made his smile more artificial, which persuaded Mike that it was authentic. "Say, do me a favor, will you?" he asked, as Mike was tying the gloves on him. "Ring up Father Flaherty for me!"

"Want his blessing?" Mike asked, heading for the phone.

"Sort of! Tell him to come over quick as he can, and to bring along some holy water."

Holy water, that was it! Father Flaherty could get rid of that ghost! Nothing must stop Terry now.

But he was afraid, and he didn't like it. Cold prickles running up his back, and something twisting his stomach around like a piece of wet wash! Why, Terry'd faced worse opponents than two Battling Redskins together, and laughed as he cauliflowered their ears. And that little leprechaun, dressed in the uniform of a subway guard, who'd tried to push him on the subway tracks! And that pretty girl he'd met at his last fight, who'd just looked at him, and then all of a sudden thrown her arms around him and kissed him! Terry had always been scared of women, but not of her. Scared of women, but not in this goose-pimply way.

Gee, but she had been a pretty girl! And she hadn't even told him her name! Just kissed him, laughed as if she liked it, and scampered lightly away.

Small, and dark—maybe Eyetalian? Maybe a Spic! But boy, she was a honey! Yum—! Wonder if she'll be out there, tonight? Wonder if I'll see her?

Aw, what's the use! If I didn't dream up that family curse business, she could be twins, and I still won't see her! Golly, poor mom!

Mike came back, shaking his head. "I couldn't get Father Flaherty. Nobody home."

"Try again, Mike."

"We ain't got much time! Looks like Rizzo is going to bop Kaplan to sleep, any minute."

"Then get a wiggle on. Mike, this is important!"

Mike thought that he understood. There had been times when things seemed to fall

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from under his own mental feet. "Sure, kid!"

Terry jumped off the table, and strode about, thumping his gloved hands together. That ghost was the real thing, all right! As real as the cry of the Flanagan banshee the night they brought pop home dead—though the neighbors swore that it was only a howling dog.

TERRY glanced at the locker again, but the hag's face wasn't there. Dawgone her, why couldn't she have stayed, and listened to reason? A heck of a fine old girl she was, persecuting people who weren't responsible for her broken heart! It wasn't fair. Terry would have smashed down any man who even mentioned hitting an old lady, but for once he thought that there might be something in the idea. A foul for a foul? No, that wasn't the way to fight! Gee, if only Father Flaherty would hurry over!

Mike returned. "Still not at home. Better take a couple of deep breaths, kid. They're counting Kaplan out." He firmly knotted the cord of Terry's robe. "Hang onto your coat, kid, the goin's rough. There's a mob right outside the door, waiting for a look at you! Souvenir hunters, I'll bet you!"

"Is the dark girl there?"

"The one who got fresh with you? No, I didn't see her!"

And so, here he was, Terry Flanagan, soon to be the late Terry Flanagan—and no priest to send away the ghost. Oh, she was present, all right, almost too painfully in evidence, for she had decided to make things easy by roosting her chin on the ropes at the Redskin's left.

She grinned nastily as the bell pealed, and for a moment Terry forgot her, as he snapped off his stool and out toward the Indian, who was advancing with all the charming delicacy of a charging elephant.

The Redskin was evidently not in on the hag's secret. He was a sportsman, and he wouldn't have fought if he were tipped off. The hag called with biting tartness, "Don't worry about me, Terence Flanagan! I won't do anything—for a while!"

The Indian was cautious. Most of the time he employed a jab to stay out of Terry's range. Terry landed a few rather heavy ones on the Redskin's chest and shoulders. But his mind wasn't on his work. Third round—

Well, say! There was a way to beat the old hag, at that! Terry had three rounds in which to fight! And what had he told the reporters last night? "I'll get him in the first round!" Sure—get him now!

"Oh, no you don't," the old woman's face sneered unkindly. "You don't get him at all while I'm here!"

And it seemed that she wasn't far wrong. Terry had always kept his head clear—you had to—but now that he was stumbling in a maze of thought, the Redskin took advantage of it, stabbing lefts to Terry's face as he circled about. Terry forgot his thinking with a jolt, and caught the Indian with a left-and-right, then snapped a left hook at his jaw, which the Indian dodged.

The Indian decided to be discreet for a while, to study up on Terry's technique just a little bit longer. Why, you could tell that the guy wasn't any too certain about himself!—for he ought to have gotten a pretty clear idea of Terry after he'd been appraising him at each of his fights!

That thought should have cheered Terry, but it didn't. It was imperative that he slap the palooka down on the spot, and he nailed him with a right smash on the chin. He followed this with a left hook to the ear, and then hammered him with another right. Why, it seemed that the guy was dizzy already! The pantywaist! This ought to be easy!

The Indian heartily concurred, and did his best to make it difficult by waltzing around, using a jab to keep out of Terry's reach. And that was all of the first round.

Terry wasn't even sweating as he thunked down on his stool.

"Holy smoke!" Mike groaned. "What did you think you were doing, you oaf? Playin' party games? You're supposed to beat his brains out! Well, go in and do it!"

The hag simpered, and let loose with a tee-hee brand of giggle. Terry glared at her, and the second round was on.

The mob was yelling good and proper now, and Terry meant business. So did the Indian. So did the hag. Terry ripped out of his corner and doubled the Indian with a right to the body, then straightened him out with both hands to the head, and staggered

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him with a left hook to the jaw. As the Indian awkwardly lifted his feet to dance around the jab, the hag's face flitted from its perch on the ropes and intervened between the battlers.

"None of that! You're not going to upset my apple-cart, young pup!"

It was a gruesome sight—a six-foot four body with shoulders like King Kong, and a little white-haired old woman's head atop the massive neck. Terry hesitated for an umpteenth of a second, and then a glove zoomed out of the face and dropped him with a left hook to the head. Bells rang in Terry's ears, but they weren't signalling the end of the round. He struggled to one knee, shook his head free of the tintinnabulations, and hurtled against the Redskin, jabbing lefts that reddened the Redskin's coppery face.

The mob had decided to go insane in a vocal way, and their shouts scrunched in from all sides like a vise of sound. Terry and the Indian played see-saw with some useless throws, and then—the bell!

Holy cats! The Indian was still lively as ever, and the old hag was making for the kill!

Mike wiped a tear from his eye. "You phoney! You unmentionable phoney! Phooey, whatever did I see in you? Kid stuff! Holy Saint Bridget!"

HE didn't have to yell, for Terry was feeling bad enough for the two of them. He'd had a demonstration of what the hag could do. Well, let her! Next time he wouldn't be so startled. Let her put her face wherever she liked, but let her look out that it didn't get pasted!

The throng was yelling as if it had lungs from the stadium to the West Coast. Terry had always liked the sound, but now it got him. He glared over at the Indian section, which was yelling like a billion bagpipes with cat attachments. And there, if you please, was the girl who'd given him that soul-searing kiss—and waving at him as she jumped excitedly up and down. Her crowd was giving her dirty looks, but she didn't seem to mind. Terry couldn't believe it. He pointed his glove to his chest. "Me?" he pantomimed. She nodded happily, and blew him a kiss.

WELL, what more could he want? Now he had still another reason to lick the Redskin!

"Enjoying yourself?" the harridan twittered, balancing herself on the floor at his feet. "This is the third—and good-by to you! Maybe I'm being hasty—I ought to let you get married so you could have some children for me to torment—but I've only four years left on earth, and I can't take any risks. You might have retired by then, or some accident might muss you up and spoil things for me. So—good-by!"

Ting!—went the bell, and Terry wobbled up on shaking legs, the goose-pimples making his back look as warty as a frog's. He heard Mike yelling advice, and groaning between every punctuation mark. Poor Mike! Poor mom! Poor creditors! Poor—that girl out there! And poor Terry!

Well, Terry was going to die trying. He swung widely, clouting the Indian a heavy one to the body, and the Redskin lurched back, hardly daring to throw a punch. The old woman? Nerts to her! Terry raked the Indian time and again.

Then he heard the hag grumble, "This has gone far enough. Now's my inning!" Terry would have liked to correct her on the differences between baseball and fighting, but he hadn't a chance. He was going to finish right now!

He staggered the Redskin with two rights, made him cover up, and punched at will. The Indian seemed to wake up to the fact that things were happening, and he put up a good resistance. He feinted by dropping forward as though he were out cold, then zipped up on spring-like knees and slammed a terrific body punch. Terry said "Oof!" then involuntarily sighed as he dragged some wind back into his lungs, and this time he let go for certain.

But the hag kept getting in the way. At first she plastered herself all over the Indian's body, and when Terry wouldn't hit her, she was careful to hide the Indian's more tender points. Terry couldn't last long at that rate, for the Indian was quick to grasp his opportunity. Probably figured that Terry was blinded by sweat. In the next few seconds, his stomach blows made Terry feel as if he'd eaten some T. N. T. and you-know-what had happened.

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Terry came out of it, and disregarded the hag entirely. She had an answer for that, and floated her ugly face right against his own, her nose clammily touching his, blinding him completely. The Indian embroidered the situation by sending a clout to Terry's chin that threw him back against the ropes, while the crowd howled like a competition between hurricanes trying to outshout tornadoes.

The ghost's face wasn't very adept at quick travel, it appeared, for Terry's backward lurch left her floating in mid-air. Terry prayed for the bell to ring so he'd have a chance to think.

Think! That's what he had to do!

He wasn't the cursing type, being the sort who said, "Hello Mom—it was a good fight and I'm glad I won it" and meant it. But now he said, "Damn!"

Yes, damn that ghost!

Ghosts!

There was that Redskin closing in on him! This was going to be the kill! Terry lashed wildly, and the Indian, who had thought Terry was groggy, also thought that he could save himself by clinching. He hugged Terry as if he had discovered a long-lost relative, and suddenly an idea—too wild for anyone but an Irishman — dive-bombed Terry's brain.

Sure, let the Indian hug him! The hag was coming around for her share, and Terry swung himself and the Indian about, fending her off. He kept the Redskin interested in the possibilities of clinches while he waltzed the hag always at the Indian's back. Funny, but she couldn't push her face against his, now! Well, his theory worked then!

The referee yanked them apart, and though the hag's face traveled swiftly, she was not a fighter with Terry's superior agility. He aimed a snake-like left hook at the Indian's chin. There was a crack which sounded like a plank snapping in two, and the Rerskin bit the dust.

THERE was hardly any need of counting. Mike was frankly weeping, his tears splashing in the water-bucket. The crowd screamed itself hoarse. The referee yanked up Terry's arm and that was that.

Or so, Terry thought at the time. But after he had showered, and was putting on

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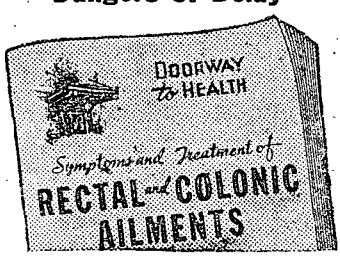

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the last of his clothes, the hag appeared. Mike was in the door, yelling to the mob that was trying to ram itself in, "Get back! Get back! He's got to have quiet!"

So Mike didn't have to be worried by the conversation which Terry held with a face that nobody could see.

"Thought you were smart, eh?" the harridan demanded crossly. "Thought you could pull a fast one!"

Terry laughed. "Sure! And I did! You see, I happened to remember all of a sudden that ghosts can't pass running water. And that's the Battling Redskin's name!"

"Ha, ha!" she snickered wickedly. "You were right!"

"Sure I was right! And I hope it teaches you a lesson not to try to hurt people who haven't hurt you! Now I've got the money, and mom's all right, and I'm champ!"

"But not for long," she prophesied. "Your mother's well off now, yes—but you won't be! I'd shake the house down on your head if I could, but I'm not allowed to harm anyone but Flanagans, and I can't dislodge the plaster in here! But I'll get you yet—you'll see! Perhaps tonight in the street—a push in front of a taxi—"

"You won't get me," Terry said. "Not if I have to build a portable moat and carry it around wherever I go."

"You can't carry an inner tube filled with water into the ring!"

"So I'll retire!"

If she had a fist, she was shaking it. "Well, you haven't got the inner tube on you, yet!"

HER face twisted with fury as she vanished, and suddenly Terry was all duck-bumps again. He sighed. Well, he'd done what he could! Maybe he'd think of something.

Mike should have had more than two arms, for he couldn't prevent the dark beauty from slipping under them and dashing to Terry. She was a dream! Her dark eyes were misty with rapture as she knocked away Terry's hands from knotting his necktie, and delivered a kiss that was like sugar-coated lightning.

"My dream man!" she cooed. "My great big Tarzan! Oh, Terry, I love you, you great big monster of a man you! I've dreamed

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of you for weeks! If you don't marry me, I shall die!"

It was rather abrupt, but if she hadn't proposed, Terry would have saved her the trouble.

"Sure, I'll marry you, Alanna, whenever you say. But I'm a doomed man—there's a—"

"Marry me right now, before some other lucky girl grabs you!"

He grinned. "Well, dawgone it, I will! I—why, I thought I'd never see you again! But, honey—I've got to warn you. I mayn't live long. You see, there's a curse on me—"

She didn't let it trouble her. She kissed him again, a whole chain of the candied thunderbolts. Mike was vanquished at last by the battering of the mob, and it torrented in, banging him against the two and spoiling kiss number twenty-three — or was it twenty-seven?

"Good grief!" Mike moaned in dismay. "Who's this?"

"My future bride," Terry said, his eyes glowing like Christmas tree ornaments.

"Yeah? But who is she?"

Terry whispered, "I didn't get your name, darling."

"My name? Oh!" she blushed and laughed shyly. "I'm Running Water's little sister, Babbling Brook!"

Terry hugged her enthusiastically.

"Baby, put your arms around me, and promise to keep them there for the next four years at least!"

She didn't seem to mind—not in the very slightest.

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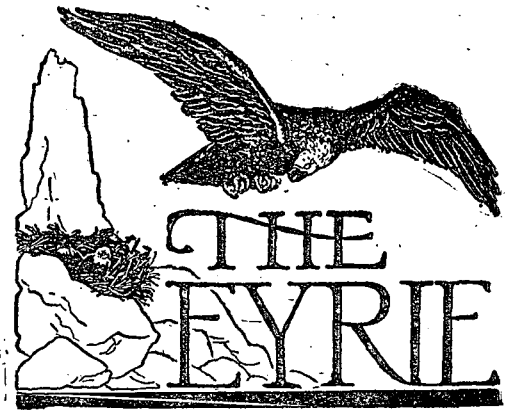

Shonokin Lore

WE WANTED to know more about those strange people, the Shonokins, who cast a long shadow of menace in Manly Wade Wellman's story, "The Dead Man's Hand."

So, naturally, we turned to John Thunstone and Thunstone's creator, Manly Wellman.

Here's what we found out:

What can I say about the Shonokins? In the brief appearance of a single member of the clan, chronicled elsewhere in this issue of WEIRD TALES, is told more about them than ever before, anywhere.

One may theorize. After all, there are many different conditions and breeds of men. Must all of them be of the same immediate ancestry as ourselves? The bulk of scientific opinion is against the theory of multiple origin of humanity. Yet do not forget what the fossil bones of many a prehistoric European burial-barrow tell us.

We may be sure that, many milleniums ago, Europe was dominated by certain strange and terrible creatures, burly and shaggy, with the hand-brain-speech combination that makes man supreme. They used fire, made stone tools, lived in communities, understood social organization, and worshipped supernatural beings—this last is shown by the fact that they buried their dead, with weapons and food for the life to come. But—men? No. Not quite. Not as we are men. They had come up from the beast along another trail than we, were destined for a vastly different development than we. Our ancestors, the splendid savages that were the first true men of which remains survive, wiped them out. It must have been the weirdest and most desperate of wars. Our side won, by ex-

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terminating those abhorrent enemies. Or what would they be today?

Maybe something like that happened in America. Maybe sons of another line than our Father Adam have survived, like us in many ways and terrifyingly unlike in others. Lovecraft's cycle of stories suggests that he knew something, and guessed more. But the specific truth about the Shonokins has only been touched by John Thunstone.

He will try to find out more, and send it along to be told to the world. Let all who are on his side wish him the best of luck. For without luck he may be destroyed in finding out. *Manly Wade Wellman.*

Bloch Looks at Bats

ROBERT BLOCH, whose searching mind has carried his fictional characters and stories into strange and outlandish situations, is currently taking up that most perplexing of minority questions—the vampire problem.

Writes Bloch, in a "good Samaritan" mood:

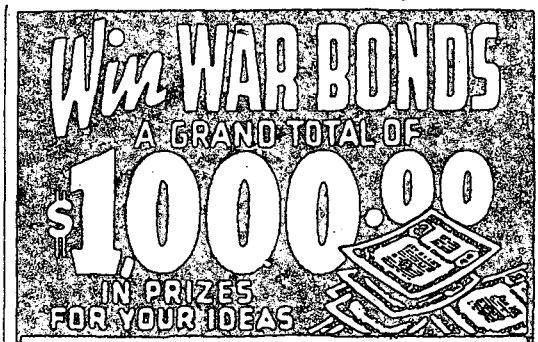
It occurs to me that I have never been represented with a vampire story in WEIRD TALES . . . an error of omission I hasten to rectify with "The Bat Is My Brother."

I recently asked myself "What would *you* do if you were a vampire?" The only answer I could think of was, "Go out and get a bite to eat."

So I sat down and began to consider the question. What are a vampire's personal problems? How does he adapt himself to his peculiar limitations? How far is his nocturnal existence allied to that of the swing-shift worker? How does a vampire regard his own condition? Why is it that vampires, in weird fiction, are invariably lone operators? If vampirism is transmissible, why don't the rank of the Undead increase in mathematical progression? With centuries to live, why aren't vampires omniscient, or at least wise enough to organize and plan dominion?

You won't find the answers to these questions in "Dracula." I don't know if all of them are in "The Bat Is My Brother." But I've tried to deal with these interesting little matters in my usual delicate style, and I hope the readers (including the vampires amongst them, of course) will get a few ideas. I am always glad to give a vampire something he can get his teeth into. Hoping you are the same,

Robert Bloch.



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THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS	THE JAR
A GENTLEMAN FROM PRAGUE	THE BAT IS MY BROTHER
RIDE THE EL TO DOOM	DARK MUMMERY
	THE DEAD MAN'S HAND
	THE GHOST PUNCH

Here's a list of eight stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3, respectively against your three favorite tales — then clip it out and mail it in to us.

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We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

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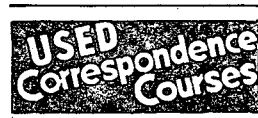

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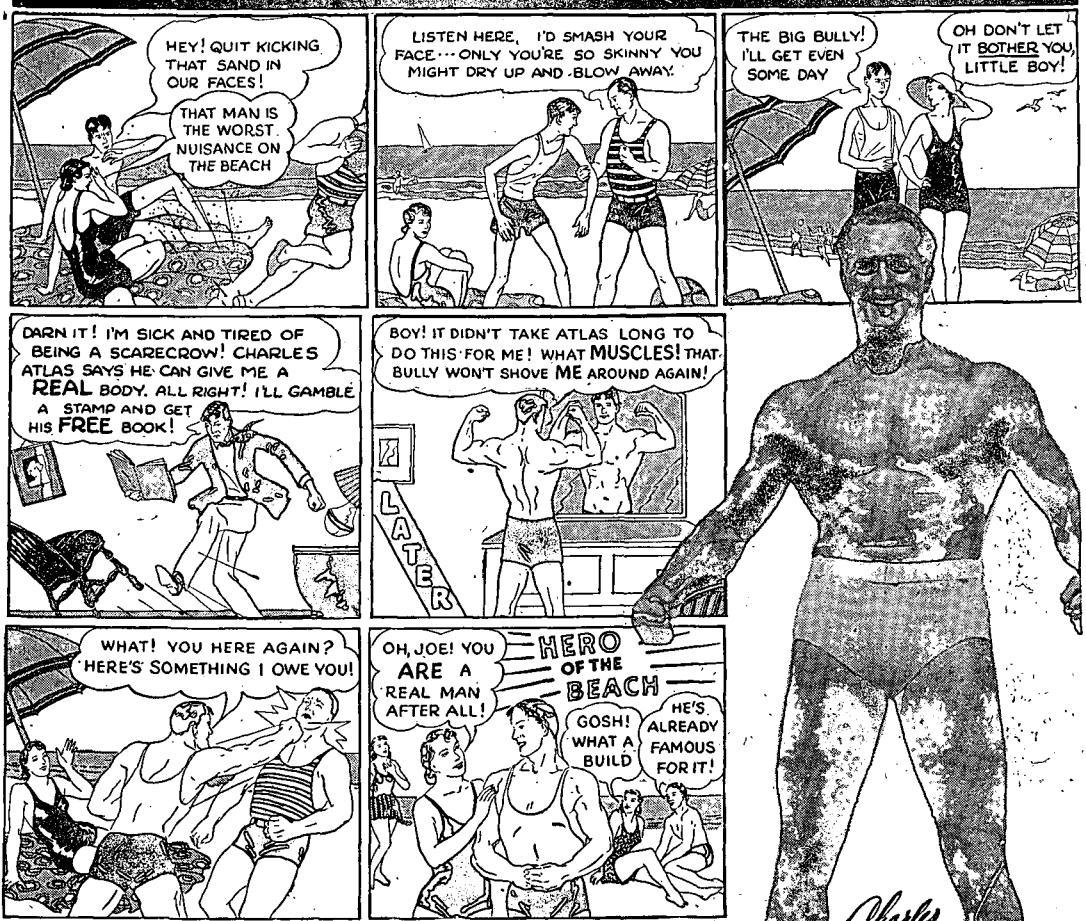

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